

I've Been Waiting For You by toes-ier (snowglobegays)

Series: [losers in 2017 \[2\]](#)

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Summary:

Each of the Losers had a thing. Richie, his mouth; Eddie, his bravery; Mike, his strength; Stan, his brain; Ben, his heart; and Beverly, her wit. Bill had his stutter, obviously, but as the group grew up and coupled off, he had one more standout feature- he was painfully single.

Then Mike Wheeler moved to Derry.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

she's here! updates when i mcfreakin feel like it sorry folks

ch 1 is many things. establishing how much bill wants a man, giving some background, and getting my desire to make it all about reddie out of the way. This is in the same world as my group chat fic, and follows the same timeline, but I changed some things so not everything is the same here as it is in that. They are def companion pieces, though, and will eventually be very much in synch.

s/o to my lovely beta paige (she started on ch 3 so 1st 2 chapters are unedited)

Each of the Losers had a *thing*. Richie, his mouth; Eddie, his bravery; Mike, his strength; Stan, his brain; Ben, his heart; and Beverly, her wit. Bill had his stutter, obviously, but as the group grew up and coupled off, he had one more standout feature- he was painfully single.

It was no surprise when Richie and Eddie started dating a few weeks into eighth grade, nor did it come as a shock when Ben and Beverly did the same in the middle of freshman year. When Mike and Stan finally came out as a couple, everyone had already known, and they were all supportive. Thus, Bill became the forever seventh wheel.

He *tried* dating, he really did. Oliver Goodman took him on a few dates, but Bill could tell he was annoyed by his stutter. Louise Brown asked him out once, but she was obviously uncomfortable with the company Bill kept (read: he and all his friends were LGBT+) and Bill made sure to keep far away from her after that. Max Coonin, a senior

during their sophomore year, was a last ditch effort for a winter boyfriend to kiss on New Years, but Bill was consumed by guilt for dating when he didn't feel anything for him. They didn't make it to Christmas.

So, unfortunately, Bill remained single.

But he didn't stay single quietly.

Complaining about it was Bill's passion. He could twist any sort of conversation into him whining about how he didn't have a man or a girlfriend, tugging at the heartstrings (and likely, the nerves) of everyone around him.

"Will s-s-someone please come see *The D-Dark Tower* with me tonight?" Bill pleaded at lunch.

Richie looked at him sympathetically. "Sorry Billy, I promised Eds I'd see it with him tonight as a little date." Then he looked smug. "Though I don't think we'll see much of it, if you know what I mean."

Bill gagged and Richie winked. Eddie smirked from behind his sandwich. "Yeah. Sorry Bill. Maybe another day."

Turning to Mike and Stan garnered a similar rejection, though much less vulgar. "It's Wednesday," Mike shrugged.

“So?!” Bill cried. “You can st-still see a m-movie.” He pouted.

“Wednesday is date night, Bill,” Stan reminded him. “Mike’s teaching me how to make curry.”

Bill deflated and turned his body to Beverly and Ben. Though, by the looks on their faces, it was a no-go. Still, he tried. “P-please? I don’t know what p-p-plans you inevitably h-have together, bu-but they can be c-canceled. Idris Elba is in this muh-movie!”

Ben at least had the decency to look genuinely upset. “I have work tonight, I’m sorry.”

“And I have a big test in Spanish tomorrow, so I’m hanging around the library with him to study.” Beverly sounded sincere as well.

Honestly, fuck his friends. Why did they all have to be in relationships with each other? Why did there have to be seven of them instead of eight? Why did *Bill* have to be the single one?

“I h-hate being single.” Bill lightly bumped his head onto the lunch table and sighed deeply and dramatically.

“There there,” Eddie patted his back. “Stop that, nobody will want to date a guy with brain damage.”

“B-but you’re dating R-Richie,” Bill retorted weakly.

Richie laughed loudly and brightly. Bill swooned a little just from the look Eddie gave him. “And Big Bill gets in a good one!” Richie cheered in his god awful announcer voice. “That’s Billiam one, Richie nilllllll.”

Shaking his head, Mike laughed. “Bill is a straight *savage*.”

Bill bolted up so fast that Ben jumped a bit. He pointed a finger at Mike. “Don’t ever, call me straight again, *Hanlon* ,” he snarled with fake anger.

“Wow Mike, you really pissed him off this time,” Stan commented. “He didn’t stutter at all.”

“You g-guys *know* I’m heterophobic.” And Bill was back to whining.

“It’s okay Billy, everyone knows you’re as bi as they come,” Beverly reassured him.

“Th-thanks, mom.”

The conversation changed after that to Beverly insisting she was *not* the group mother, it was definitely Eddie, but Bill was still emo on the inside. He lamented his eternal loneliness as each loser chose the side of their partner in the argument. It simple was not fair.

Bill went home that day just to sit alone in his bed and rewatch all of BuzzFeed Unsolved and not do his homework. Ben texted him at 9pm, sending him a picture of the AP Calculus work, and promised him they could see *The Dark Tower* together the next day. Bill smiled.

Thanks Ben, he texted. *You're the bestest.*

At 11:45, Richie and Eddie came tumbling into Bill's window unannounced. They did this sometimes, when they were bored on a night Richie had snuck over to Eddie's, or if Richie couldn't stay at Eddie's or at his own home. Perks of being next door neighbors with the Kaspbracks.

This time, their visit wasn't one of joy. There was a long, deep gash on Richie's forearm that was bleeding heavily. Richie already looked woozy and Eddie was pale as a sheet. Both of their clothes were coated in blood, Richie more than Eddie.

"H-holy shit, Rich, what h-happened to you?" Bill whispered as he rushed to his closet for some clean towels to lay over his bed.

While situating Richie so his arm was elevated, Eddie answered. "He was in my room after our date, but my mom came home and started to come in my room so he had to jump out of my window. His arm got caught on a sharp edge or a tree branch going down I guess, and I obviously couldn't leave him to bleed out."

Bill was relieved that the cut was from an accidental fall and not...

well, he didn't have to worry about that right then, he supposed. The thought was pushed to the back of his mind. "Wh-what do you need?"

Eddie wiped his bloody hands on his sweatpants and stood. "We need to clean his arm and disinfect it and bandage it. He also needs water and should probably eat something with lots of iron in it. He's lost kind of a lot of blood."

Bill nodded. "O-ok. You go to my bathroom and clean his arm, I'll go to the kitchen and get f-first aid and s-some dark ch-chocolate. That okay?"

"Yeah," Eddie replied. He slowly helped Richie rise to his feet and they stumbled as quietly as possible to Bill's bathroom.

Bill left before he could hear Eddie reassuring his injured boyfriend.

His mom was still on the couch downstairs, but Bill could hear her snores quietly over the sounds of the television. She had fallen asleep watching reruns of shows from her childhood again. Bill smiled fondly as he crept to the first aid closet. There was a basket of band-aids and gauze and neosporin, so Bill grabbed the whole thing. He snatched a water bottle from the fridge and a bar of dark chocolate from his dad's "secret" stash and prayed he wouldn't notice, before dashing silently back up the stairs.

Eddie had moved Richie back to the bed and had changed both of their clothes into what Bill recognized as things they had left at his house in the past.

“Our bloody clothes are soaking in your sink,” Eddie whispered. “I wouldn’t go in there. It looks like a murder scene.”

“You’ll h-have to clean it up before l-leaving,” Bill reprimanded.

“Leaving?” Eddie squeaked quietly. “I can’t *leave* him here!”

Giving Eddie his most unimpressed look, Bill pursed his lips. “Wh-what else are you g-gonna do? S-sleep on the floor?”

The freaking *germaphobe* nodded in desperate agreement. “I can pull out a sleeping bag, or make a palette, or-”

“E-Eddie,” Bill sighed, cutting him off before he could work himself into a frenzy. “You h-have to go home. Your m-mom will notice if you’re g-g-gone, plus you n-never wake up early enough to sn-sneak back h-home.”

“But-!” Eddie tried to protest, but stopped himself before slouching dramatically and pouting. It would have been adorable had his hands and part of his face not been covered in drying blood. “I have to help him clean up, though.”

Bill raised the basket with supplies in it to indicate he had it. “I c-can help him. You cl-clean my bathroom.’

Dragging his feet, Eddie slumped back to Bill’s bathroom.

Bill turned and approached Richie, who was sitting on his towed bed with the slashed arm held up by his heart. "Hey, R-Rich," Bill whispered sweetly. "I need to p-put some n-n-neosporin on th-this, okay?"

Dazedly, Richie nodded. There was a smudge of blood on his right glasses lens. Bill wiped it off before opening the antibiotic ointment and dabbing it onto the cut. The wound still bled a little, and Bill had to wipe his ointmenty and bloody fingers off on the towel under them. He winced as the red stained his mom's clean, white towel. She wouldn't be very upset due to the circumstances, but Bill would have to be the one to bleach the towel back to peak cleanliness.

"D-do you feel any b-better?"

Richie nodded slightly. He swayed slightly from his upright position, so Bill made him drink some water before laying down. The pallid tone of the hurt boy's skin made Bill debate waking his mother, but he eventually decided to wait until morning.

When Eddie walked out of Bill's hopefully spotless bathroom, he smiled with all the softness in the world at the half-asleep Richie. "I have to go now," he whispered, caressing his curls and freckled cheeks. "Mean Bill is making me leave. But I'll come over first thing tomorrow, okay? Promise."

"Promise," Richie mumbled in response. He was basically already gone. "Love you."

"I love you too, Trashmouth. Sleep well."

Eddie kissed Richie's forehead before heading to the window. With one last glance at his boyfriend, he vanished into the night.

As Bill settled down next to Richie and pulled the covers to his chin, his heart ached. There was nothing he wanted more than that type of love- the kind Richie and Eddie shared. The kind of love that was more than what he felt for the Losers, and what they felt for him. He knew that he would do anything for his friends, and that their windows and doors were always open for him should he have a bad night, but Bill knew what he'd find if he tried.

Never in a million years would anyone in their right mind attempt to climb into Richie or Eddie's rooms. Bill had already seen them in compromising positions too many times to count; he would not add to that number. Stan liked the warmth of Mike's home, and Mike liked the neatness of Stan's. The two rarely slept apart. Beverly did rock climbing in her spare time and found herself a pro at it, so scaling the wall to Ben's second floor room was no problem. She liked to brag about it, and occasionally called herself Spider-Woman. (That nickname never stuck.)

The way Eddie risked his mother's wrath every night just so Richie would sleep well in a loving environment, the way he immediately leapt out of a window when he noticed Richie was hurt, the way he was so willing to sleep on Bill's dirty floor despite the fact that he refused to sit on a park bench without some sort of covering, the way he was so reluctant to leave... Bill wanted that with every fiber of his being.

That night, Bill dreamed of a different life. A window he crawled through every night, a set date night to see movies and go for drives

on, a guy who would do anything for him, would jump outside of his comfort zone for him. It was warm and bright and in the morning, Bill awoke feeling empty and cold.

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Thursday did not start out great.

Besides feeling like crap because he had to live in his dumb real life and not the beautiful dream world, Bill had to deal with his mother, who stood disapprovingly at the foot of his bed, eyes fixed on Richie.

“Bill,” she reprimanded. “What did I say about impromptu sleepovers on a school night?”

“That I c-can’t have them,” he said sheepishly as he sat up. “But M-mom, he’s h-hurt.”

Richie woke up as well as Bill pulled his bandaged arm out for his mom to inspect.

She closed her eyes and sighed, before speaking softly. “You know I don’t mind if Richie comes over when home isn’t good, but I would like to be informed of our guest’s presence.”

“Sorry, Mrs. ‘Brough,” Richie mumbled. “It was real late.”

Mrs. Denbrough finally took hold of the injured arm and gently peeled back the bandage to get a better look at it. "What happened to you?" she asked kindly.

"'Twas just a stick from a tree on the outside of my lovely Eds' house!" Richie said in his god awful British accent. "Had me a nasty fall, didn't I? No big deal, got 'er all bandaged up now!"

Mrs. Denbrough sighed again. "Get up, you two. Billy, you're taking Georgie to school today, please. I'm taking Richie to get this checked out. A cut from a branch can get infected." She tugged off the covers and motioned her hands to get the teens up.

Bill groaned as he got out of bed. "B-but *Mom* ," he whined. "Without Richie at school, Eddie is going to be *insufferable* ."

As if on cue, the doorbell rang. Nobody would visit so early on a school day but a worried Eddie. Richie's face lit up.

Mrs. Denbrough chuckled. "Speak of the devil. Bill, go let him in. He can talk to Richie until it's time to go."

Bill slunk out of his room and into the cold kitchen. Eddie stood on the porch, worrying his bottom lip and wringing his hands. He stopped when Bill opened the door. He immediately bombarded Bill with millions of questions. "Is he okay? Where is he? I want to see him. Is he awake? Is the cut infected? Did it start bleeding overnight?" Eddie sounded so desperate and distressed that Bill's

heart clenched.

“C-come in,” he stepped aside. “He’s in my r-room. My mom wants t-to take him to the d-doctor just in c-case. I guess I’m t-taking you to school t-today.”

Eddie barely listened, instead he shouldered past Bill and dashed to his room. Rolling his eyes, Bill went to his bathroom to get ready. He could hear murmurings of conversation from through the door. When it was time to go, Eddie nearly refused to leave. It took Georgie tearing up because he was afraid of being late for them to really get going.

“Keep me updated, Rich! Love you!” Eddie yelled as Bill pushed him outside.

“Come *on* Eddie, w-we have to g-gooooo.”

At school, much to the disappointment of all the Losers, Eddie was a complete asshole. Ben walked out of french looking seconds away from committing murder, and Angela from Eddie’s AP Bio class asked Bill why he had been so sassy with the teacher in class. Bill told her that Richie wasn’t at school, and she nodded like she understood. She probably did, actually. Richie and Eddie were notorious throughout the school, so it made sense to people who didn’t even know them that Eddie would be a pissbaby without Richie. There was one perk of being single- Bill was never so consumed by worry that he became an absolute *dick*.

In 5th period AP US History, the one class they all had together,

Eddie was worse than he had been all day. “Would you stop fucking tapping that?” Eddie hissed at Bill, referring to how Bill was tapping his pencil on his desk to a random tune. “I’m trying to fucking listen, and I can’t if you’re being annoying.”

Bill rolled his eyes but ceased the tapping. *Hmph*, he thought, *Eddie never gets mad at Richie when he’s being annoying and noisy. He’s much more obnoxious than I am.*

That was another good side to his eternal loneliness. Bill didn’t have to find annoying qualities endearing. He could bitch to Richie about his constant jittering however much he wanted, in a way that Eddie couldn’t.

Except then Bill noticed Eddie taking two sets of notes. His first thought was *third perk! I only have to take notes for me!* But after looking at the paper in front of him, he grimaced. There were only a few words scribbled down almost illegibly, and an assortment of shitty doodles of he and his friends lined the margins.

Ok, so maybe Bill needed someone to take two sets of notes for him.

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During 7th period Newspaper, Bill’s mom texted him.

sweet mother of mine- Richie got special ointment. Insurance covered it all. Tell Eddie he can come over after school. I told Richie that he

could stay with us again tonight, but he said hee needed to go home. He might change his mind though. Tell me if he does.

big billiam- thanks mom :) <3

Eddie was incredibly relieved when Bill texted him.

eight nights at eddies- He's staying at mine tonight, of course. I will definitely come home with you. I can't believe my tree tried to kill him.

Bill laughed, but accidentally met the glare of his teacher.

"Phone down, Denbrough, or I'll take it."

"Y-yes sir. S-sorry, it was my m-mom."

"Just focus on writing your article, kid."

When the bell rang for dismissal, Bill dashed to his car. Eddie was already there, taking a puff of his inhaler and leaning on the passenger side door.

"He's not g-going anywhere, Eddie. There's n-no rush," Bill tried to joke, but Eddie wasn't in the mood.

He gave Bill an impatient glare as they climbed into the car. “I’m fucking *worried* Bill. I shoved him out of my goddamn window. Sue me for being upset that my boyfriend is hurt. You don’t know what it’s like to love someone like this, just fucking drive.”

Bill didn’t respond, and the whole drive home was incredibly awkward. The car was silent save for the quiet radio. It was the new song of Liam Payne from One Direction, and both boys knew Richie, Stan, and Ben hated it, but didn’t move to change the station or mock the song’s shrill repetitiveness. Bill hadn’t felt uncomfortable with Eddie in a long time. He didn’t like the change.

Once at the Denbrough residence, Eddie finally caved. “Sorry I was a dick all day. And sorry I snapped at you.” Eddie squeezed Bill’s arm. “And sorry for saying you’ve never loved anyone like this. It was a low blow.”

“It’s f-fine, Eddie.” Bill was touched by the sweet apology, but Eddie wasn’t done.

“It’s not fine, Bill. That was very rude of me, and you and the others didn’t deserve my attitude today.” The look Eddie was giving was one of the most serious ones Bill had ever seen.

He quirked a grin. “I a-a-accept your apology, then. Thanks, Eddie.”

The two embraced when they exited the car. Eddie was obviously eager to go inside and see his boyfriend, so Bill kept the hug short and quickly unlocked the door. Richie was set up on the couch, wrapped in blankets and holding steaming mug. His eyes were glazed

over, like he was high.

“The doctor gave him some painkillers while they looked at and cleaned the cut,” Bill’s mom said as a way of welcoming them home. “He’s still pretty out of it.”

Eddie quickly jumped on the couch and nestled himself beside Richie, curling into him and sighing contentedly. He craned his neck back to grin widely at Mrs. Denbrough. “Thank you for taking care him. It means a lot.”

“Of course, darling.” She walked over and ruffled Eddie’s hair like she sometimes did to Georgie and Bill. “If his parents won’t do it, I will. Now, you two stay as long as you please. I have to go to a PTA meeting for Georgie’s school, so no funny business.” She tapped Eddie on the nose. “His ointment is in the blue bag by the fridge. DOn’t forget it if you leave.”

She kissed the top of Bill’s head and called out a kind “Be safe!” as she gathered her things and left.

“You t-two do whatever y-you want. I’m going to s-see *The Dark Tower* with B-Ben and Stan,” Bill said as he walked to his room to put down his backpack. He shouldered on his dad’s denim jacket that he always wore to the movies. It had a lot of pockets, making it perfect for smuggling in candy. Richie and Eddie were somehow already asleep on the couch by the time Bill left his room. “G-goodnight, I guess.”

The Dark Tower was incredible. Ben and Stan didn’t annoy him with

dumb comments or make him try to sneak in a whole pizza (like Beverly once did) and they had a nice discussion about it over ice cream afterwards.

“Is Richie alright?” Ben asked when they finished talking about the movie.

“Y-yeah, he has some s-special ointment. I l-left him and Eddie asleep on my c-couch.”

“Typical,” Stan snorted. “Eddie’s a brat all day and falls asleep right when he’s with Richie.”

“They love each other,” Ben protested. “It’s cute.”

“You don’t see me turning into a dick when I’m not with Mike,” Stan retorted.

Bill snickered into his cone. “You kind of s-sound hypocritical. If you r-rudely say you’re n-not a dick, well...” he trailed off, still laughing.

“Oh, hush Bill,” Stan pushed him gently, but tragically, Bill wasn’t expecting movement and dropped his ice cream.

“STAN!” Bill shrieked. “Aww m-man! You owe me a c-cone!”

The rest of the night was uneventful. Richie and Eddie were gone by the time Bill got home, so he just went straight to his room and actually studied a little. He dreamt of a warm love again, but waking up was less jarring than the day before. The day felt promising, so Bill went to school with a light heart and a bright smile. It was the last day before break, he knew most of his teachers wouldn't make them do work, and they day just felt *right*. Bill didn't find out why until the afternoon.

Richie got detention again, of course, so Bill sat with Eddie after school. They were together when Beverly sent the texts.

beverly hills chihuahua- hey billlllllyyyyyyy

big billiam- yes beverly

beverly hills chihuahua- u know that guy Will at my job

big billiam- the shrimpy one?

beverly hills chihuahua- savage

beverly hills chihuahua- yes

beverly hills chihuahua- he's very kind and he says! that his buddy from indiana is moving here and he says that u and him... very similar... would get on very well...

big billiam- oh worm??????

Beverly told the group that the boy was Mike Wheeler, Will's best friend. He was apparently tall and skinny and had freckles and was very cute. Apparently, Will had been hyping Bill up to Mike for weeks, so it was really a done deal. Bill really had a potential new man.

After dropping Eddie off at the nearby Baskin Robbins where Richie would eventually meet him, Bill went on a long drive. He loved going around all the hidden backroads of Derry, sometimes he would even leave the city to explore new areas. The Beatles played softly from the radio as he toured the small, winding roads miles away from civilization.

Mike Wheeler from Indiana. Friends with Will Byers. Will was nice; he always let Bill use his employee discount at the coffeeshop whenever Beverly was working. If Mike Wheeler was Will-Approved, he couldn't be too bad.

Alright, Mike Wheeler , Bill thought as he heard his phone *ding* from Beverly sending him Mike's number. *I'll give you a chance.*

Maybe being single wouldn't be Bill's *thing* anymore.

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

The way Mike spoke- so earnestly, so sincerely, made Bill smile wider than he knew possible. He knew that if he looked in a mirror, he'd see a disgustingly fond look on his face, similar to how Richie looks at Eddie, or Beverly looks at Ben, or Mike looks at Stan, and vice versa to them all. The same type of look he gagged at and made fun of. If only they could see him, he'd never hear the end of it. The look lingered on his face for hours after they hung up.

Notes for the Chapter:

IM SORRY i said wednesday and here it is, thursday. this bitch is deadass 7k tho yall never in my life have i written something this long.

im going 2 tell the truth. i have not edited this all the way thru bc i finished and do not want to look at it again. also, you can tell the parts i wrote at 1 am because they are stupid. please tell me if something is stupid so i can fix it.

ALSO also, bill, richie, and bev smoke some we'd in this chapter bc they love weed and im the author so i make the rules and also if there is something i have experience with. :)

After driving around for about an hour, Bill turned into the mostly empty parking lot of an off brand grocery store and parked so he could text Mike Wheeler. Better sooner than later, and if Bill had to wait until he drove all the way back home before he texted Mike, he would probably combust. (Also, there was a high chance that some of the Losers were already at his house, and Bill didn't want them to bear witness to whatever embarrassing moments he was inevitably going to have.)

big billiam- hewwo bill here

Oh god, oh fuck, oh holy man in the clouds, Bill is so *stupid*. *Why the fuck did I start with HEWWO? I just totally blew this oh my god. This is the exact type of moment I wanted to avoid.*

Bill quickly backtracked on the awful first impression he just made.

big billiam- ok im going to kms now i don't know why i did that

And that's not much better, is it? He went from furry to suicidal. It would come as no surprise when Mike never responded, but Bill would have to tell Beverly and all the rest of the Losers how he managed to fuck it up so badly on the first text and- oh.

Mike Wheeler- biww? fwom maine?

Bill blushed. Mike Wheeler was kind, he could already tell. Well, kind, or possibly a furry. He felt like he would have been warned ahead of time if he was being set up with a furry, though.

big billiam- bless

big billiam- yes it is i, derry bill

These were new waters Bill was treading in. He was quite inexperienced in the whole meeting new people and *talking to* a guy thing. He wasn't doing too well. At least Mike was playing along.

Mike Wheeler- im indiana mike

Indiana Mike had a nice ring to it... Bill told Mike that because of Mike Hanlon, that nickname would likely stick. Mike immediately changed his name to *Indiana Mike* . Ok, that was cute.

They talked for a few more minutes, Bill asking if Mike was excited for the move, Mike saying he was thrilled to not be the nerd in the friend group, then revealing he was a goddamn *giant* at 6'2, and then, when Bill said he was 5'9-

indiana mike- that's not too short! I like short guys they are cute :)

big billiam- :)

THIS IS NOT A DRILL! Bill dropped his face into his hands and blushed furiously. Thankfully, there was nobody around to witness Bill being totally smitten by this guy already. How in the world did he, after only one small conversation, feel butterflies in his stomach? How was this allowed? Maybe Bill was coming down with something; he should call Eddie and describe his symptoms.

In the end, instead of calling Eddie, Bill drove back home to find Mike and Stan playing with Georgie, and Beverly and Ben texting to say they were on the way. Richie and Eddie got to his house late (Bill didn't want to know *why*) so he simply told them he texted Mike Wheeler and moved on. All through *Tangled* , Georgie (and Ben's) favorite movie, between bouts of enthusiastic singing, Bill thought of Mike. *Does he like Disney? Do he and his friends have movie night?*

And even though it was unbelievably sappy, and far too early, and extremely uncalled for, Bill fell asleep to the thought- *Is he my new dream?*

-

Saturday began early with Georgie leaping onto the mass of slumbering bodies gathered in the living room. "It's Saturday!" he yelled. "It's fall break! I want pancakes!"

Mike and Stan had been awake for hours, so they gently dragged Georgie into the kitchen to make him breakfast. Unfortunately, the other five had already been awoken by the screeching. Even more unfortunately, Richie stepped on Bill's chest as he stumbled across the room to where Eddie slept.

The seven Losers had always had sleepovers, but once everyone started dating each other, parents became uncomfortable with them all sleeping in the same house. Eventually, Bill struck a deal with his mom, who struck a deal with all the other parents, saying that the couples wouldn't sleep anywhere near each other and wouldn't be allowed into Bill's room. This meant that couples had to be forced apart as they fell asleep, and this also meant that the first thing Richie did each morning was dash across the room to his boyfriend, stepping on everyone in his path.

“Richie, if you don’t get your smelly ass foot out of my hair *right now*,” Beverly grumbled, “I’m not holding Ben back next time he wants to kill you.”

“Sorry Bev,” Richie said, but somehow, he didn’t look or sound sorry at all. Then he turned to Eddie and pulled him into a deep kiss. “Goodmorning, gorgeous,” he whispered.

Per usual, Eddie smacked his arm and whined about morning breath and dirty teeth, but Richie laughed it off and kissed him again. PDA so early in the morning made Bill gag. “Can you g-guys do that somewhere e-else?” he grumbled, rolling over and burying his face into his pillow. “It’s so nasty.”

“Awww, Billy, don’t be jealous!” Richie cooed.

“Yeah, Bill, you texted this new Mike right? Maybe in a few weeks we won’t be the only ones making out...” Eddie trailed off mischievously.

“You will be, b-because no matter *h-how* cute new Mike is, I will not m-make out with him at...” he checked his phone for the time, groaning again. “Seven thirty e-eight in the m-morning. You two are disgusting.”

“Practice makes perfect, my good fellow!” Richie crowed in his British accent.

“Richie, please, just *beep beep* . It’s too early,” Beverly whined. “I can’t stand you in the morning.”

“But you love me every other time of the day,” he grinned evilly. She grimaced.

“I don’t,” Ben muttered. “I hate you every other time of the day.”

“Hey man it’s daytime,” Eddie defended. “You gotta be nice to him now.”

“Them’s the rules.” Richie shrugged innocently. He wasn’t innocent, he was *evil*, but stupid Eddie had to stand up for him all the time.

“BREAKFAST!” Georgie came flying into the living room and smacked straight into Richie, making him fall backwards onto Bill, Ben, and Beverly. Bill felt all the air leave his lungs in a big *whoosh* as Richie’s bony ass landed on his back, but with the way Georgie was laughing, and how Stan was filming them (likely for snapchat) he really felt content. Even though there was a gangly teenager still sprawled on his back, definitely bruising him.

Richie really had not butt. Poor Eddie.

-

The rest of the day consisted of movies (both real people *Scooby Doo* movies, per Georgie’s request), far too many grilled cheeses to be healthy (“Bill, where did all the cheese go?” “Mom, I’m d-dying.”), and the longest food coma Bill ever fell into. At eight PM, after

waking up from said coma, he noticed he had a text from Indiana Mike.

indiana mike- What is the high school like

And oh boy, what the high school was like. Whitehaven High was the best public school Derry had to offer. Four thousand students, three buildings, thirty one Advanced Placement classes available, and twenty National Merit Semifinalists, it should have been an incredible school. Sure, there were plenty of good teachers, and the lights always worked, and there was that one fancy water fountain near the library, but other than that, Whitehaven was pretty much a hellhole. After a truly iconic fight in the cafeteria when the Losers were still in middle school, Whitehaven gained the lovely nickname Fighthaven. The rat infestation, the failing air conditioning, the cockroaches that regularly fell from the ceilings, and the plethora of incompetent teachers really made it difficult for Bill to like his school. It was always exciting when a fight broke out in the middle of lunch and he got to watch a girl get her weave ripped out, and it was truly hilarious to see Whitehaven on the news after two teachers were caught *fornicating in a locker room* during the school day, but Bill wished he could get a real education while not having to worry about if the water will scald his hands when he goes to wash them after lunch.

Poor Indiana Mike.

big billiam- well we're on fall break right now

big billiam- but it's.... something

indiana mike- bad something?

So Bill explained the way Fighthaven truly operated, and he held back no details. Mike was obviously flabbergasted, and likely wishing he was staying in Hawkins, but Bill wasn't going to *lie* to him.

big billiam- it's a good school it's just a mess

indiana mike- then i'll fit right in :)

**big billiam- I don't have any classes with Will but i hope you do
+ maybe... some classes**

with me :)

Bill decided last minute to be a bit forward... Mike had already been a bit brash by saying he liked boys shorter than him, so Bill needed to throw out a hint that he knew where they were (hopefully) headed.

indiana mike- i hope i have all my classes with you

So, Mike obviously knew that Bill was *talking* talking to him, and was responding adequately. Bill was most certainly not blushing. (He was.)

Bill definitely could have kept texting Mike about the school and the town and literally anything, but then Richie and Eddie got drunk and

nearly jumped off the quarry. While waiting for Mike (Hanlon) and Stan to carry the two drunk idiots to the Kaspbrak's house, he climbed into Eddie's room and texted Mike (Wheeler) goodnight.

indiana mike- goodnight to you too! sweet dreams :)

Awesome.

-

Sunday was all nursing hungover Richie back to full consciousness while Stan and Mike cared for Eddie. Every time Bill tried to usher Richie *out*, the stupid Trashmouth drug his hands into Bill's bedsheets and refused to budge. Bill just wanted a little privacy to text Mike, was that too much to ask for?

"Can you leave?" he asked when he'd finally had enough. "I want to text M-Mike. I'm not doing that with you here."

"But Bill, my head," Richie whined, rolling so the top half of his body hung off of the bed and he could peer at Bill pitifully. "Don't leave me for someone else. Is he hotter than me?"

Bill scoffed and rolled his eyes. "It's been hours, Richie, your head shouldn't hurt too bad anymore. It's late. Go home. Go to Eddie's."

"I thought Eddie and I made it clear last night that *Eddie* is my home." Richie smiled that lovesick smile that made Bill gag.

“Then go to him! He is one w-window climb away.”

“Fine,” Richie pouted. “I’m telling Eds that you don’t love us anymore.” He flopped out of Bill’s bed and sauntered out the door.

“Good,” Bill sneered at his retreating form. “It won’t be a l-lie.”

Richie stumbled like he had been hit, and threw back the most betrayed look Bill had ever seen. “I’ve been shot!” he wailed as he dramatically tripped to the front door. “Shot Betrayed! Hurt! Destroyed! Heartbroken!” Bill tuned out the rest. Richie should join theater.

Immediately after the drama queen left, Bill whipped out his phone to text Mike.

big billiam- finally i am no longer bothered by the devils that are my friends

indiana mike- tell me about them! im gonna have to be friends with them too right? Ii should know what im walking into

big billiam- oooh boy there’s 7 of us... 6 people is a lot to text about my thumbs are not that powerful

big billiam- do you wanna call?

indiana mike- YES sure!!! :)

Oh goodness gracious why the hell did Bill suggest that. Of course Mike would want to *call him* . Classic Mike. (He didn't know Mike well enough to determine if something was classically *him* . A phone call could get them nearer to that closeness, though...)

big billiam- real quick before we call

big billiam- i have a stutter and it's not that bad anymore but i get stuck on some words, especially if i talk for a while, so you gotta bear with me

indiana mike- of course! i dont mind at all

Ok, here we go, Billy. You're calling your potential new man. On the phone. Hearing his voice. He's hearing yours, and you have an stutter that people are frequently annoyed by, and-

His phone rang.

After taking a deep, shaky breath, Bill pressed *answer*. When the call connected, there was a moment of fuzzy silence before Mike spoke. "Hi."

“Hi.” Bill was already blushing.

“How are you?”

“I’m g-good.” *Oh god.* Bill winced. “I’m just in my room.” He spoke slowly, so he didn’t stutter again.

Mike somehow saw right through him. “You don’t have to worry about your stutter. I don’t mind.”

“Sometimes it t-takes a l-long time to get a w-w-w-ord out. I don’t want to annoy y-you.” *Fuck fuck fuck fuck! Stop stuttering!*

“Bill, I promise I won’t get annoyed,” Mike reassured. “I want to hear about your friends.”

Bill bit his lip. “Okay. I d-don’t know where to s-s-start.”

Mike hummed. “Well, just start with uhhh... Beverly. I know a little about her from Will already. Plus, she’s the only one whose name I know.”

Bill chuckled quietly. “Alright. Beverly is...” Bill suddenly forgot everything he knew about his friend. “She’s... brave. Really brave. She l-l-likes to smoke, way t-too much. She and R-Richie always run off t-together to smoke. It’s awful.”

“Smoking is the worst,” Mike agreed. “Will’s mom is a big smoker, and we’ve been trying to get her to stop for years.”

“S-same with us, but not even angry Eddie or B-Ben can get them to stop. Only my l-little brother, Georgie, can get them to stop.”

Mike gasped softly. “You have a little brother? How old is he? I have a little sister who’s seven; maybe they could be friends.”

A little sister! How precious. “Georgie’s nine, but I’m s-sure he would play w-with her. What’s her name?”

“She’s Holly. She doesn’t speak much, and was pretty clingy as a baby so her and my mom are close but she doesn’t have many friends her age.”

“Well, I’ll make sure her and G-Georgie meet.” There was another moment of mildly awkward silence before Bill remembered why they had called in the first place. “There’s m-more to Bev than sm-smoking... she lives with her aunt because her dad was a real dick and her aunt l-loves us all... she’s very funny, kind of maternal but more like a sister to all of us... except Ben I guess. That would be w-weird.”

“Ben and Beverly are dating, I suppose?”

“Yeah, they have been for about t-two years.” Bill nodded even though Mike couldn’t see him.

“Wow.” Mike sounded a little shocked. “Two years is a while.”

Bill snorted. "I guess. Stan and Mike have b-been dating about that long, and Richie and Eddie have b-been dating for three. It's disgusting."

"Oh yeah, what's Derry Mike like? We have the same name!" And Mike sounded so *earnest* about someone having his same name, and it was adorable, and Bill was already pretty enamoured by this boy.

"Mike Hanlon is the b-best. He's honestly probably the nicest person I've ever met."

"Well, shoot, I have to be *extra* nice now to live up to my name," Mike laughed. It was beautiful... and vaguely familiar. Bill didn't take the time to place the resemblance.

"Nah, you'll be f-fine. Mike's nice, but he's a b-badass too."

"How does this make me fine?!" Mike shrieked shrilly. "I'm not *the* nicest person, nor am I a badass!" He paused. "Actually, I kind of am a badass. I once set some tunnels on fire."

Bill let out a surprised bark of laughter. "Sure, burning some t-tunnels is badass."

"I swear it was! There was a whole bunch of other shit going on and-well, I'll tell you later, in person."

“Ooh,” Bill teased. “Mysterious.”

“You bet!” Mike joked. “Now tell me about Beverly’ boyfriend. Will’s mentioned him a few times too, but doesn’t know him well because Ben is...”

“He’s shy,” Bill finished. “Ben is super n-nice but real quiet until y-you get to know him”

Mike laughed. “Will is like that. My friend El is too. It takes her a minute to warm up, but when she does she’s a hoot.”

“I think you’ll l-like Ben, then,” Bill smiled.

“Alright, so there’s Beverly who is brave, Mike Hanlon who is sunshine, Ben who is shy at first, and Richie who... smokes?” Mike clarified.

Bill snorted. “Oh, Richie is m-more than just a smoker. Very big personality. He’s loud as shit, says e-everything he thinks, tells shitty jokes, the whole nine yards. C-classic jokester. A lot of people think he’s annoying, and h-honestly he can be, but he’s loyal till the end and we all love him. Except he c-curses a lot, in front of anyone. Parents are the only exception, b-but just so they like him.”

“My buddy Dustin is like that! He’s so dramatic and talkative and

loyal and shit and he curses like... every other word. He can really drive our other friend Lucas insane.” Mike spoke so fondly about his friends, Bill wanted to hug him.

“Well Richie d-drives Eddie insane. I probably don’t even hear h-half the shit Richie tell *him*. I’m shocked Eddie’s never p-punched him. It’s very satisfying.”

“Have you punched him?” Mike questioned.

“Maybe. Yes. A few s-summer ago. I don’t remember why but I distinctly remember e-enjoying it.”

“Don’t get on you bad side then!” Mike noted. “So Richie and Eddie are dating?”

“Oh yeah, strongest c-couple I know. It’s disgusting.” Bill wrinkled his nose. “Eddie’s really s-sweet and unsuspecting looking because he dresses so nice and is always s-so clean, but his mouth is just as filthy as Richie’s. He’s really funny, h-he and Rich and Stan can go back and forth for hours cracking each other up. Eddie’s also r-really into medicine so anytime anything is wrong with us, h-health wise, we hit him up.”

“So he’s basically the group doctor? Is he going into the field?”

“Maybe. He likes m-medicine because his mom is pretty fucking crazy and thinks he’s always sick so she does real research to prove h-he’s okay so she doesn’t try to force him to take m-more placebos.”

“Oh. That’s intense,” Mike said awkwardly.

“Yeah. Sorry for d-dropping that on y-you like that,” Bill rubbed his neck, embarrassed.

“No, it’s fine,” Mike insisted. “It’s cool that he’s doing research to stand up to her like that.”

“Yeah,” Bill sighed with relief, “we’re all p-pretty proud of him.”

“That’s five out of six friends, then.”

“Yep, number s-six is Stanley! Stan the man. I love Stan he’s j-just so... jewish and uptight but is so done with e-everyone all the time and he’s fucking hilarious. He and Derry Mike are dating and they are the p-purest couple. Every Wednesday n-night they go to Mike’s house so he can teach Stan how to cook something, and they eat it t-together under the stars.”

“That’s so cute!” Mike squealed. “El would probably start crying if I told her that.”

“You should! I wanna h-hear about your friends too, you know.”

“I will! I want to know more about the Derry people first, seeing as

I'm moving there and all."

"Of course," Bill chuckled. "From the outside, it looks like Stan and Ben hate Richie, and honestly we all p-probably look like we hate Richie from time to time, but we love him very m-much. Stan is a fake bully sometimes; he says things that w-would be mean if he meant them, but he loves us, so you can't take any of his n-nonsense to heart."

Mike hummed in understanding. "My friend Max is like that. She obviously cares for us, but she acts like we're the worst thing to ever happen to her."

"Yeah, that's Stan," Bill laughed.

There were some background noises from Mike's house, and he whined. "Oh man, I would really love to hear more, but it's time for dinner. Sorry I have to go," Mike apologized. "We can call again though, right?"

"Of course!" Bill grinned. "Definitely. Enjoy your dinner, Mike."

"Bye, Bill."

Mike called back right after he finished eating to tell Bill about his friends, who he lovingly dubbed *The Party* , kind of like how the Derry kids were *The Losers* . Bill was smitten.

The way Mike spoke- so *earnestly*, so *sincerely* , made Bill smile wider than he knew possible. He knew that if he looked in a mirror, he'd see a disgustingly fond look on his face, similar to how Richie looks at Eddie, or Beverly looks at Ben, or Mike looks at Stan, and vice versa to them all. The same type of look he gagged at and made fun of. If only they could see him, he'd never hear the end of it. The look lingered on his face for hours after they hung up.

Mrs. Denbrough popped her head into Bill's room to say goodnight, but she paused when she noticed his obvious happiness. "What's got you so smiley?" she asked, leaning against the doorway and quirking up the side of her mouth."

"I h-have a potential boyfriend," Bill bashfully informed her. "He's moving h-here from Indiana in a few d-days."

"Oh?" she asked, fondly amused. "What's this potential boyfriend's name? How do we know him?"

"His n-name is Mike Wheeler, he's a junior, and he's f-friends with a guy Bev w-works with."

"Mike? Won't that get confusing? You should call one of them Michael to keep from mixing them up," she offered.

"We've been calling him Indiana Mike," Bill admitted.

His mom laughed at him then. “Indiana Mike,” she giggled. “You and your friends need to be more creative. That name is dumb.”

“Goodnight, *mother* ,” Bill said sternly.

She kept laughing as she blew him a kiss and closed the door.

Indiana Mike isn't that bad. We can easily keep it from getting confusing.
Bill sighed. *Who am I kidding. Indiana Mike is such an ugly name.*

Bill dreamed of a tall, handsome boy in a tractor, riding around Derry setting fire to tunnels. He hoped it wasn't an omen.

-

Ever since Bill first texted Mike, he felt... different. Never in his life had he felt like this. He really liked Mike, somehow. They had never met, had only texted a few times, had only called a few times, and Bill was already so so *smitten* . Whenever his phone pinged with a text notification, his heart sped up. If the text was from Mike, he would smile for actual *hours*. If it was from literally anyone else, his heart would drop into his stomach. There was something magnetic about Mike, something that made Bill trust him with everything he had. Mike was already high up on Bill's snapchat best friend list, and they regularly send each other funny posts on instagram. In just a few days, they formed a full fledged something-more-than-friends relationship.

It terrified Bill.

Neither Oliver, nor Louise, nor Max, had *ever* elicited this sort of feeling from Bill. All the dates had been stilted, all the kisses dry, and none had even added Bill on snapchat. He had never felt the need to add them. There hadn't been a closeness, like he felt with Mike. How was he supposed to deal with these feelings? Did Mike feel the same? Bill knew that Will had been talking Bill up to Mike for a few weeks, but they didn't know each other well. Mike could come in with high expectations that would certainly get crushed once they really met.

Realistically, Bill was being dramatic. Mike was willing to talk to him, he was patient over the phone, he was witty when they texted, and he obviously had every intention to become good friends with Bill and the other Losers. He never complained about the group chat, and he was open about his feelings toward everyone. Hell, their second time texting, Mike had said he wanted to have all his classes with Bill. *Then* , after their first call, Mike had gushed about loving Bill's voice.

Being insecure was fun sometimes, though, in a twisted sort of way. Bill could confess mild feelings of *I'm not good enough for Mike* with Stan, or Beverly, and they would dash to his house with hot chocolate, or freshly baked cookies, or Richie's good weed, and he could vent and maybe cry and come out feeling better. It felt like manipulation, and Bill did genuinely feel awful after calling someone over for nights that weren't great, but it was something he needed.

Over the past three years, Bill had developed a system of repressing his feelings while simultaneously dealing with them, superficially. Wallow for a few days, get high, laugh out his insecurities, and go on a long drive the next day to asses what he said. So far, it worked pretty well.

Something told Bill that once Mike moved to Derry, he'd have to

actually face his feelings.

“Bottling shit up, it’s my p-p-passion,” Bill said on Tuesday night, holding Richie’s dragon pipe in his left hand. Smoke swirled out of it. “If Indiana Mike makes me t-talk about shit, he’s gone.”

“Nah man,” Richie shook his head very minutely. “You gotta... you gotta communicate and shit. Ask Eddie. You gotta tell each other... things.”

Beverly pointed at both boys with one hand and two fingers. “Richard is correct. If I didn’t tell Ben things, we wouldn’t last. We’d be... long gone.”

Bill put his mouth back on the pipe. As he inhaled the sharp smoke, and his mind grew a little hazier, a little more weightless, he considered their words, and considered how he felt about Mike.

“So you’re t-telling me,” he exhaled the smoke as he spoke, “that if I wanna d-date him, I have to talk emotions.”

“Exactly,” Richie said, barely moving his head to look at Bill. “You gotta talk, you know? No jealousy shit, no games or anything, you just say things and it’s all good. Me, personally, I don’t particularly enjoy it. When I go to Eddie’s because my parents are fugly, I don’t wanna say what happened, I wanna fucking wallow, but then I remember he loves me and I gotta tell him, like he has to know I love him too, and I always feel better. Depression?” Richie slowly sat up to gently take the pipe from Bill. “I don’t know her.”

"I only know love 'n trust 'n stability," Beverly said. "Ben and I are the same. If he didn't tell me when he was feelin' insecure, how could I kiss him until he felt better?" She made grabby hands at Richie's pipe, but he held it out of her reach. Sighing, she turned back to Bill. "It's not fun to do the talking, but you gotta. How would you feel if it turned out Mike was feelin' like shit and never told you?"

"Bad," Bill said. "I want him to t-talk to me but guys, I have a s-system! Get high, then forget it. Actually t-talking about shit will mess it up!"

Richie huffed out a smoky laugh before handing the pipe to Beverly. "Aw man, it's empty!" she whined. "Richie, make another."

"Honey, I am too high for that," Richie giggled. "No can do."

Beverly turned to Bill with a pout and the pipe held carefully on her palms. "Billy?"

Bill squinted and sat up to grab the baggie, but the drugs rushed through him harder at the sudden movement. "Nah," he said, laying back against the chair. "I don't have h-hands. I can't."

So that was the last they smoked that night, and Bill sat in the cold November weather for another half hour listening to Richie and Beverly's rambling while thinking about Mike.

Communication... he had never been good at that. There was a fuzzy memory in the back of his mind, fuzzier due to the weed, but he could still make it out. Something about him being brutally honest with his friends... his parents didn't love him, they all thought Georgie was dead... nobody believed him... *walking into this house is easier than walking into my own.*

That was the only time he had been brutally honest like that. Honest in a way that blamed other people, that wasn't Bill just being sad for the sake of being sad. He had been sad because his mom didn't make him dinner the night before, because his dad had yelled at him, because his parents acted like they had lost the only son they had, even when they had another... and since Bill was thinking about it, he realized that some of those feelings still lingered.

His thoughts were cut off when Richie started singing "For No One" by The Beatles in his russian accent and *shit* , if that wasn't the funniest thing Bill had ever heard. So, he let his mood do a complete 180, and he and Beverly started singing along, though neither could get the accent right. They transitioned into other songs, trying new accents and banging beats onto the table, but nothing was funnier than russian Richie and The Beatles.

I get high with a little help from my friends, yeah, I get by with a little help from my friends.

Bill snorted at the irony.

-

Bill woke up at 1pm the next day, and he felt great. He had a missed call from Mike at 9:32am, so he texted him to see if he was still down to talk. Mike answered by calling him.

“Did you just wake up?” Mike laughed into the phone.

“Yep,” Bill croaked. “Had a r-rager last night. Got too lit.” He snorted. “That’s a lie, it wasn’t a r-rager. Just me and the c-crew.”

“That’s fun,” Mike said. “I spent last night packing up and loading boxes into a truck. I’m actually on the road right now.”

Bill sat up so quickly his head spun a little. “I totally f-forgot you were getting here today, this is amazing.” He bounced giddily on his bed. “We still d-down for coffee tomorrow, at n-noon?”

“Yes! Honestly Bill, if you ever see me without coffee, there’s a problem,” Mike joked. “It’s my favorite food. It’s kind of a problem.”

“Damn right it is,” a female voice said in the background, followed by a short gasp of *Language, Nancy!* and Bill laughed.

“I assume that’s n-not Holly.”

“No, that’s my big sister Nancy.” Then there was some rustling on the line, and a few shouts, and Mike let out a long whine that sounded like *give me my phone back, you cow, I’m talking to Bill!* before another voice spoke into his ear.

“This is Bill?” she said.

“Yeah, Bill Denbrough,” Bill confirmed, a tad nervously.

“I thought Mike said you had a stutter.” She sounded surprised.

“Not on every word, Nance, don’t be rude!” Mike said faintly. “Give it back, you’re such a bully!”

“And you’re a brat!” she laughed. “Well,” she focused back on Bill. “I’m Nancy, Mike’s older sister. You better be nice to my brother, Bill. I know how to fire a gun. Look out.”

A small scuffle, and a few seconds later, Mike was back on the line, panting lightly. “Sorry about my stupid sister. She does know how to work guns, but we don’t own any. We like gun control.”

Bill grinned so foolishly he pinched his leg. “That’s good, b-but don’t say that here. Local f-furry Henry Bowers loves g-guns. He’ll try to turn you.”

“Turn me into a furry or into someone who likes guns?”

And Bill burst out laughing. He couldn’t help it; imagining Nancy and the rest of the Wheelers hearing that out of context was gold. Once he calmed down, Bill heard a grown woman ask Mike what a furry was, and he was gone again.

“Tell her what a f-furry is,” Bill giggled.

Mike sighed, but complied. “Mom, a furry is someone who... well, someone who uh. Dresses up like an animal, like identifies as one? Sexually?”

A shrill *MIKE* and a cackling from Nancy made Bill crack up even more. “Oh my g-god,” he wheezed. “Mike, you worded that so terribly.”

“You tell my mom what a furry is then!” Mike cried.

“NO! You did a f-fine job.” Bill wiped his eyes.

“I cannot *believe* that I had to tell my own mother what a furry is,” Mike grumbled. “I hate this.”

“Sorry,” Bill said very insincerely. “She’d learn at some p-point; Bowers is the sheriff’s son. You’ll meet him eventually, and your m-mom should know beforehand that he’s a furry, in case he shows up in a f-fursuit or a dog collar.”

Mike made a gagging sound. “Derry sounds wild.”

“You’ll f-find out soon enough,” Bill reminded him. “How f-far away are you?”

“Uh, like a few hours? Indiana and Maine are not very close. We left

really really early this morning, like 3am early. It'll be pretty late when we get in."

Worry pierced at Bill. If they were getting in late, would Mike wanna meet up the next day? What if he was too tired from the long drive? Bill closed his eyes. Ok, he needed to calm down. Mike had *just* confirmed their meeting time. Except Bill knew that Derry and Hawkins were about seventeen hours apart, and leaving at 3am meant nine or ten, and the Wheelers needed time to unpack and get settled. "Do you-"

"Before you ask, I do not want to change our meeting time. We already shipped our beds and a lot of stuff up there, and the Byers set stuff up. I'm spending the night with Will, and then he has work tomorrow at noon, so everything works out perfectly," Mike interrupted. "I'm meeting you as soon as I can."

Alright then, Mike was an angel. "I'm excited," Bill said. "My friends are excited to meet you too."

"Wait, are they going to be there too?" Mike asked. "Tomorrow?"

"Oh god no," Bill laughed. "No, I wouldn't-let them be there. You need time to settle before you have to m-meet them."

"Oh come on," Mike laughed. "I like your friends. Would you rather was lots of fun."

"They're embarrassing is what th-they are. I don't know *what* Bev was on, talking about a s-slug in Eddie's b-butt."

Mike snorted. "You're focusing on that when Richie literally said he would fight some kindergartners?"

"Who wants to fight kindergartners? Should we be worried over Holly's safety?" Bill heard Mike's mom ask.

"No, Mom, Richie's not going to fight Holly." Then Mike spoke directly to Bill. "Right?"

"No, Rich won't f-fight Holly. I'm t-telling him your mom was w-worried, though."

"Tell me how he responds."

"I w-will," Bill promised, "but he's probably still asleep r-right now."

"It's the afternoon, Bill!" Mike exclaimed. "Why is everyone still sleeping?"

"Other Mike and Stan probably woke up early," Bill offered.

"Oh, so the guy that works on a farm and his boyfriend who likes sticking to a schedule both woke up at a reasonable hour?" Mike droned sarcastically. "They're the outliers, Bill, they don't count."

"Well excuse m-me if Derry is a lazy town!" Bill laughed.

Mike gasped. “Lazy Town!”

A lightbulb went off. *Time to test Mike’s meme knowledge!* “It’s a piece of cake to bake a pretty cake!” Bill started.

“If the way is hazy, you gotta do the cooking by the book!” Mike giggled, and Bill heard Nancy groan fondly at him. “You know you can’t be lazy!”

Bill jumped in. “Never use a messy recipe, the cake will end up crazy, but if you do the cooking by the book-”

Eddie suddenly burst into Bill’s bedroom. “Then you’ll have a cake!” he hollered.

And Richie was right behind him, practically screaming. “Break it down bitch! Lemme see you back it up!”

Oh goody, there was Stan too. “Drop that ass down low then pick that motherfucker up!” Of course Mike Hanlon was there as well, giggling as Stan dropped it low against him. “Back that pussy, she’s a motherfucker!”

Mike Wheeler was laughing *hysterically* on the phone, having heard the whole thing. “I love these guys,” he wheezed.

“You f-four are *insufferable* ,” Bill said, but he was giggling as well. “If

my mom was home w-we'd be dead."

"Your mom loves me," Mike Hanlon reminded him. "She'd only be mad if Georgie was here too."

"That's true," Bill sighed. "Still, n-nearly gave me a fucking heart attack."

Eddie snatched Bill's phone out of his hands and put it on speaker. "Are we speaking to the one, the only, *Indiana Mike* ?!"

"Yeah!" came Mike's slightly broken up response. Bill's phone always sounded awful on speaker. "Nice singing."

"Thanks," Richie yelled, much too loudly, directly into the phone. Bill could almost hear Mike wince. "Why were you two calling?" he teased.

"Bill just woke up and I've been in a car all day. He's my entertainment."

"Oh?" Stan asked slyly and rose an eyebrow at Bill, but Bill threw a pillow at his face.

"Oh shut up, Stan."

“Not that type of entertainment, guys. I’m in the car with my whole family. Maybe wait until a rest stop when I can be alone, Bill.”

“ *Mike!* ” Mrs. Wheeler screeched again, and Mike snorted.

“Just kidding mother! I’m an angel.”

“Sure,” Nancy said faintly and sarcastically.

“Ooh, who’s that?” Richie asked. “She sounds hot.”

“That’s my sister, you perv,” Mike snickered.

“She’s like, t-twenty, Richie. Too old, it would n-never work,” Bill told him.

“You also have a... hmm, what’s it called?” Eddie tapped his chin sarcastically. “Oh yeah! A boyfriend!”

“Ah yes, indeed!” British Richie said. “My boyfriend, who I want to make out with in the movie theater. Come on Bill, up up, we’re seeing *Thor* .”

So Bill had to hang up on Mike and leave him alone in the car, but neither boy minded much.

They were about to *meet*.

-

Thor was incredible, but Bill only paid half attention. Instead of listening to Odin's big confession, he thought about what he would wear the next day. Instead of watching the Hulk fight... something, he wondered what Mike looked like. Instead of being bored as the credits rolled and Richie and Eddie laughed at all the people who got up leave, he fretted over whether or not the date would be awkward. He left the theater aware that he had just watched a really solid movie, but with almost no memories of the plot. Was there a lava monster, or was he thinking about *Moana* ?

Ultimately, Bill forced Richie and Stan to help him plan his outfit. Richie could input his wild fashion sense and make Bill look brashly good, and Stan could reel him in when his ideas got a little too... out there.

"No way in *hell* is he wearing that out in public." Stan stared down Richie.

"Ok, but think about this- he looks good as shit," Richie pointed out.

Bill looked down at what he had been forced into. He had on a pair of Richie's purple and dark yellow *floral pants* (why did Richie own those?) and a soft, oversized olive green sweater that had been produced out of nowhere. The colors clashed a little, but actually kind of worked together. It was still a tacky outfit, but was perfect for fall, so Bill felt confident. "I like it."

Stan turned to look at him confusedly. “Why?”

“Yes!” Richie pumped an arm as he cheered. “Now, we gotta find the right shoes!”

“No,” Stan shook his head, “no, you cannot add any of your tacky ass shoes to this... ensemble. Anything other than some black shoes and it’s too much.”

And Bill had to agree, so he rolled up his sleeves and put on his typical black vans. Richie still cheered as he paraded his outfit around the room, giving them a look at every angle.

“I like the rolled up sleeves,” Stan admitted. “It is tacky, but you look good. Might as well start strong.”

“And then stay strong!” Richie said enthusiastically. “You should invest in some floral, Bill, it’s really a look on you and even though I don’t wanna be denounced as fashion king, I’ll be able to take it if I get to see you *stunt* like this every day.”

“In you d-dreams, Tozier. These floral pants are a o-one or two time thing.”

“I think they should be an all the time thing.”

“I think you should beep beep the fuck up, Richie, and reevaluate

your fashion sense.,” Stan grumbled. “Those hurt my eyes.”

“I am a fashion *king* , Stan, a *king*. You can’t denounce me like this!”

“If y-you two are going to argue about c-clothes for the rest of the night, you can do that somewhere else. I have to get up early tomorrow,” Bill interrupted. “Thank you for the clothes, Richie, and f-for the input Stan, but get the fuck out.”

Stan and Richie continued to argue as they stomped out of the Denbrough’s house and down the driveway to Richie’s truck. Bill smiled fondly as Stan slammed his car door shut much more aggressively than he needed to. *Such drama queens.*

Although Bill was thankful for the silence, he wished he had a distraction as the night wore on and his nerves grew. He watched four episodes of *Criminal Minds* to calm himself down before turning off the lights. Of course, he couldn’t sleep. It was like the night before Christmas, or before a big vacation. Little thoughts of Mike and who Bill knew him as ran through his mind all night, and when he eventually conked out at almost four a.m., he dreamt of their date.

Sunflowers, coffee, laughter, warmth, blushes, soft sweaters.

-

Morning time came far too soon. The outfit Bill felt so comfortable in the night before felt almost too tacky, but he squeezed into it anyway. He brushed his teeth and ate a handful of cheerios before dashing outside. It was a nice day; the sun was out but the air was cool and a soft breeze ruffled Bill’s hair, so he decided to walk. Really, his hands were shaking too much for him to be comfortable

driving, but he stuck with the mental excuse.

Walking turned out to be a good idea, because it gave Bill time to shake out some of his nerves. “He thrusts his fists against the p-posts, *fuck*, ” Bill muttered. “The posts, and still insists h-he, *shit*, sees the ghosts.” *Ok Bill, only stuttered twice. Go again.* “He thrusts his fists against the posts, and still insists he sees th-the g-ghosts. W-whatever.”

Mike had already heard his stutter. It would be worse with all the nerves curing through Bill’s veins, but honestly if it annoyed Mike, he didn’t deserve Bill anyway. *Wow, I sound like Ben* , Bill laughed to himself. He supposed Ben (and mental Bill) were right, though. He was going to be fine.

So Bill let out a deep breath and shook his hands lightly as the coffeeshop came into view. The smell of coffee wafted through the air, getting stronger the closer he got, and then he could see through the window. His eyes immediately jumped to the corner, where the Loser Table sat, and spotted a figure sitting with his back to the street. Excitement bubbled in his stomach as he approached the door, warming his heart and making him grin giddily.

Then he noticed just who the person at the table was.

What the fuck was *Richie* doing there?

Notes for the Chapter:

chapter 3 on wednesday. it won't be 7k. it will be much shorter.

sorry if any parts felt rushed. also sorry if i never

responded to your comment on chapter 1 i'll get there bc i love and appreciate you.

tumblr- toes-ier

comments make me write SO FAST ;)

3. Chapter 3

Summary for the Chapter:

Bill almost looked down bashfully as well, but he couldn't tear his eyes away from the boy sitting across from him. It really was unnerving, how similar Mike and Richie looked. The same nose and teeth Richie had been ridiculed for, the same freckles Eddie gushed over, the same lanky limbs and long fingers.

Notes for the Chapter:

-alright alright! fuck the schedule i set for myself! i update when i update!!!!!! (but im kinda pumped 2 write the next chapter so we will see...)

- texts are p much the same from the gc fic but the gc fic is so far into the future i included them 1. to help ppl remember and 2. in case ppl havent read it (read it)

-this is.... sadder than i anticipated it being... but makes sense. sorry 4 the wait guys! enjoy! bon appetit!

richie does not eat dog poop

big billiam- richie i see you

eight nights at eddies- Why are you in my house

big billiam- ??????? he's at the shop

big billiam- rich i thought i told you not to come

big dad ritch- im at eddies

big billiam- no you're not

big billiam- you're sitting at our table in bev's coffeeshop

eight nights at eddies- I am actually sitting on him right now

benjamin button- TMI

eight nights at eddies- Grow up, Ben

big dad ritch- idk what ur on bill im at eds

big billiam- suuure

big billiam- i have proof im omw to talk to u

big billiam- jsyk im a little pissed (:

Bill curled up a lip as he marched into the coffeeshop. Why the *fuck* was Richie there, and why was he lying about it? A bell above the door twinkled welcomingly as he stormed inside, but the usually comforting sound just grated on his nerves. The *one time* he didn't want his friends there, Richie barged in, invading his privacy, invading his date, and inevitably made Mike uncomfortable.

For some reason, Richie wasn't wearing his glasses, which confused and angered Bill even more. Reason flew from his mind as he reached the table, and he lashed out. "Richie, where the fuck are your glasses? Actually, I don't wanna know. If you wanted to creep in on my date with Mike, you could have at least sat at a different table and done more to disguise yourself. You're not fooling anyone," he snarled lowly, angry. "Go the fuck home, and tell Eddie I'm disappointed in him for playing along with your stupid little game, when he should know better."

Instead of laughing, or blushing, or even running home with his tail tucked between his legs like he *should* have done, Richie just stared at him blankly, mouth hanging open. "Huh?" he asked. His voice was a bit softer than usual. "Bill?"

"Richie." Bill tapped his foot and pointed to the door. "Out."

Then Richie *finally* laughed. Yet it wasn't the malicious prankster laugh Bill heard daily, it was a nervous confused laugh he'd never

heard before. "I'm... not Richie..." Richie said, with a lilt to his words, like he was asking a question. "I'm Mike."

Bill snorted. "A-and I'm Princess Consuela Banana Hammock." He rolled his eyes, then sighed. "Please, just, go home, Rich. The real Mike should be h-here soon, and I don't want you here when I meet him, I a-already told you."

Richie didn't move to stand up. He just kept looking up toward Bill, and insisted, "I'm Mike, Mike Wheeler, Indiana Mike. I got here ten minutes ago because I didn't want to be late and also because I walked here and was afraid of getting lost. It's me, Bill."

His diction, his tone, the soft look in his eyes, the warmth that spread through Bill when they made eye contact... maybe this *was* Mike, and Bill was just going crazy. Bill slowly took a step toward the seat opposite Richie-maybe-Mike, and sunk down.

"It's me," Richie (Mike?) said softly.

Bill eyed him suspiciously. "How can I know f-for sure?"

"Uhhhh..." Mike-or-Richie drummed his fingers against the floral tabletop for a few seconds before stopping. "Lazy Town?"

"Richie w-was there too." Bill shook his head. "Something else."

Mike-or-Richie started tapping his fingers again, and this time he didn't stop when he spoke. "Nancy stole my phone while we were talking yesterday, and she was confused as to why you didn't stutter."

All the blood rushed from Bill's face. "Fuck," he blanched. "I didn't tell a-anyone about that."

Then *Mike* (not Richie) gave Bill the softest, sweetest smile, and Bill melted.

"In retrospect, w-we should have sent each other selfies before m-meeting."

"Hindsight is 20/20," Mike shrugged. "We did have snapchat. Why did we only send each other ceiling pictures?"

The tense situation suddenly grew funny, and some color returned to Bill's cheeks. He laughed. "That was really dumb of u-us."

"I'm shocked I never even thought to ask for a picture of you." Then Mike looked down. "I was so into your personality I never considered your looks."

Bill almost looked down bashfully as well, but he couldn't tear his eyes away from the boy sitting across from him. It really was unnerving, how similar Mike and Richie looked. The same nose and teeth Richie had been ridiculed for, the same freckles Eddie gushed over, the same lanky limbs and long fingers. The only differences were the absence of Richie's signature cokebottle glasses, and that Mike's hair wasn't the same mess of curls Richie had; it was fluffy and mostly straight, if not a bit wavy. It all threw Bill off. Sure, he had liked Richie in elementary school; heck, Richie had been the first boy he liked! It wasn't so outrageous for Bill to be into Mike if he was literally Richie's twin, but it still felt... wrong. Like Eddie would be upset, or Mike would be uncomfortable.

But Bill already had his hopes up *so high* , and already liked Mike *so much* , he hoped with all his might that they'd be able to stand the awkward situation.

So, he matched Mike in levels of fond, and said, "Bev gave a v-very brief and vague description of you, but I didn't i-imagine you as Richie. This is s-so bizarre." Mike's face fell, and Bill backtracked quickly. "I-it's not a bad thing! I don't m-mind that you look like h-him! I actually had a *crush* on him for a while!" And fuck, that sure wasn't the right thing to say either. Bill's face burned with embarrassment and he felt like a fish out of water. "This i-is a mess," he said. "You're g-gorgeous, Mike, even looking like Richie."

All the insecurity melted away from Mike, and he looked confident in a way that Richie never was. Richie was cocky; he was sure that he was loved, he was secure in his relationship, he always looked like he had nothing to lose because everything he had was solidly *his*. Mike was confident like he was pumped with adrenaline, like he just got a push to make a move, like he *could* lose something, but knew he wouldn't.

"You're gorgeous too, Bill. Really. Will told me a little, but he could have told me that you were the most handsome boy he'd ever seen and I would have still been in awe," Mike said, obviously confident about Bill's reaction.

Alright, not what Bill expected! *This is fine!* "W-wow," he managed. "Thank you."

Mike's confidence didn't ebb. "I mean it." He paused. "Do you have any pictures of Richie? So I can see my twin?"

"Sure." Bill pulled out his phone and scrolled through his photos. There was a ridiculous amount of selfies from bad angles of all the Losers, most of which from when they had stolen his phone and taken hundreds of them. He eventually chose a picture Ben had taken of Richie, Eddie, and Bill, all sitting in a booth, with both Eddie and Bill sharing a milkshake. Richie was smiling sweetly at them both, his giant glasses exemplifying the love in his eyes. It was a cute picture. "Here." He turned the phone to Mike. "The o-one with glasses who looks like you."

The burst of bewildered laughter Bill was expecting never came. Mike just stared at the picture, wrinkling his brows and scrunching his nose. He grimaced slightly as he glanced up at Bill. "That guy?" he asked. "Are you sure?"

Bill snatched his phone away. "Yes!" he frowned, scrolling to find another picture. He chose one of Richie standing in front of a pole, holding his glasses that were in two pieces. "I took this a-after he ran into a pole. No glasses."

Mike clicked his tongue and shook his head. "I... honestly don't see it, Bill. I feel like I look nothing like him."

Bill could only gape. An awkward silence surrounded them, but Bill didn't care. He had yelled at Mike because he looked so much like Richie, and he didn't see it? "Let m-me take a selfie, a-at least, so I can show the others later."

Mike shrugged. "They'll probably think you're crazy, because I look nothing like that guy, but it won't hurt. As long as you send it to me

too.” He winked as he stood up and slid into the seat next to Bill.

Bill lifted his phone to get them both in the picture. He didn’t care about the odd lighting or the bad angle; this was just evidence that *Mike and Richie were twins*. “S-say cheese.”

And of course, Mike actually said a long, drawn out *cheeeeeeeese* as Bill took a few shots. Of course he did. Of course he was corny like that. Of course Bill was smitten.

After they took the selfie, Mike didn’t move back to across from Bill. They stayed sat on one side of the booth, pressed together, even though there was easily room for two more people on the seat. A waitress eventually came over and took their order. Bill got his customary caramel macchiato, but Mike opted for a more... *elaborate* drink.

“Yeah, I would like one large vanilla latte with two extra shots, extra whipped cream, and caramel and mocha drizzle on top.” Bill could feel the vibrato of his words though his side. Mike glanced sideways at Bill. “Do you want a muffin? Of course you do.” He turned back to the waitress, who was smirking oddly at them both. “And two heated blueberry muffins, please.”

“Coming right up, Bill, Richie.” She winked. “You look better without your glasses. Sorry you and Eddie broke up.” She flounced away to punch in their orders.

Bill was a little pissed. “Was she *flirting* w-with you?” he asked incredulously. “What the hell?”

Mike was confused as well, but not because of the flirting, (when they were *clearly* on some sort of date) but because, well. “Did she call me Richie?” He blinked a few times. “She called me Richie!”

Bill leaned more into Mike. “You do look e-exactly the same.” He laughed. “She said you look better w-without glasses, that is s-so mean.”

That made Mike laugh, and they sat, thighs nearly overlapping, arms rendered useless from the force at which they met, warmth passing

between them in a rush of new affection. Their ankles inched nearer and nearer each other with every passing minute, itching to interlock. Before they could, however, the waitress returned with their drinks.

“I meant what I said about looking better without glasses, Rich,” she purred as she laid out their muffins. Bill bristled. “And what I said about you and Eddie. Such a shame. Bill’s a real doll for treating you to coffee, right?” She brushed her hands down her black apron. “Hey, now that you’re single, how’d you feel about catching a movie later? Maybe tonight?”

Mike, the poor soul, was speechless. His cheeks were practically radiating heat. Bill could feel how Mike’s muscles had tensed up, so he took action.

“This isn’t Richie,” Bill explained. “This i-is Mike Wheeler, from Indiana. He and Will a-are friends.”

The waitress looked unconvinced, and equally as pissed as Bill had felt earlier. “If you didn’t wanna go out, you could’ve said. I see why Eddie dumped you.” She stalked off angrily.

The aghast look on Mike’s face made Bill giggle, and Bill’s giggle made Mike chuckle, and their quiet laughter soon grew loud and boisterous. A comfortable warmth permeated the air around them again, and Mike leaned back into Bill’s side as he lifted his drink. When he took a sip, the mountain of whipped cream and syrups on top caught his nose and left a small dollop right on the tip. If they had known each other for longer, Bill might have kissed the cream away, but he didn’t want to cross Mike’s limits. Instead, after some difficult maneuvering to reach Mike’s nose whilst still remaining as close as possible, he wiped it away with a napkin.

“Thanks,” Mike whispered, a little cross eyed due to how close their faces were.

“You’re welcome,” Bill breathed back.

A dizzying moment of brown eyes boring into blue, of freckles lining up with smooth cheeks, of breaths intermingling. It stretched on, until the bell above the door twinkled from someone walking in,

subsequently jolting them out of their haze. Mike smiled sheepishly, and Bill pulled back to crumple the napkin and set it on the side of the table.

Bill cleared his throat. "You have to be careful w-with that much whipped cream," he chastised.

Mike took another long sip in response, but this time angled his mug expertly to keep the toppings away. "I know how to drink coffee," he said once he swallowed. "This was my signature drink back in Indiana."

Of course he had gotten whipped cream on his nose on *purpose* .

"There's gotta be so m-much sugar in that," Bill pointed out. "You drink e-enough of those and you'll die."

Mike nodded. "That's the goal," he said, and subsequently gulped down half the drink.

"Maybe I should try o-one of those, then."

"Drinking sugary coffee with too much caffeine and whipped cream until you get diabetes and die is the best way to go, right?"

Bill blinked. "I mean, y-you're not wrong," he shrugged.

Then Mike quirked up his lips in a way that was so *Richie Tozier* that Bill cringed outwardly. The small smile fell into a frown.

"What's wrong?"

The similarities didn't necessarily bother Bill, not to such an extent that he was uncomfortable with Mike, but seeing Richie's face on a guy he was on a kind-of-date with was so unbelievably bizarre that Bill couldn't control his reactions.

"It's nothing," Bill reassured. "You just looked a l-lot like Richie for a second. It's fine. It'll take s-some getting used to."

Mike didn't look very reassured, so Bill took the initiative and linked their ankles. When he picked up his macchiato, he made sure to hold

it so the steam could explain the flush on his cheeks. Mike's blush was obvious; his drink was half gone, and so there was nothing to hide the glow spreading through his freckles.

"If the others think I look like him, will Eddie hate me?" Mike asked quietly, but not sadly.

"Nah, h-he'll probably just be jealous," Bill teased.

"Why?"

"You and Richie are a *l-little* different. You're cuter. Plus, this just p-proves that I can get his man."

Mike laughed lightly. "Just because you think we look the same doesn't mean that your personalities would work."

"Oh believe m-me, I know," Bill mumbled. "I don't know h-how Eddie manages him all the t-time."

"This only proves that Richie could've gotten you, not the other way around. Eddie should be worried that you'll start to like his man." Mike shrugged indifferently. "That is, if he thinks we look the same, which we do not."

Bill shoved Mike playfully. "Oh c-come on! "

By then, the intense atmosphere from earlier had completely dissipated, and their conversations stayed light. They talked about their favorite shows ("*I could probably recite the whole first episode of Friends right now.*" "*Mike, no.*") and what memes they could always laugh at ("*To o-our new YAKT.*" "*The c is silent, Bill.*" "*Yes, you're right, the s-sea is very tranquil.*"), and recited vines back and forth for as long as they could go without pausing. ("*Hey whaddup, it's ya boy, uh, skinnypenis.*" "*I raise y-you, road work ahead? Uh, y-yeah, I sure hope it does!*") They would have discussed their favorite movies, but they were interrupted by a waitress- not the one who had flirted with Mike- telling them that the shop was closing.

"What time is it?" Mike questioned.

"It's 6pm, sir," the waitress said kindly. "We close kind of early, my

apologies.”

“Holy *shit* ,” Mike laughed. “We’ve been here for six hours?”

“Oh my god, when did it get d-dark?”

Mike jumped as he turned his head to see the *pitch blackness* outside of the window they sat next to. “How the hell...” he muttered. “I mean, alright, I guess. Time is fake anyway.”

The waitress looked amused as she collected their cold mugs, watching the two boys stumble out of their booth and immediately shiver with the loss of contact. Mike grabbed Bill’s hand, instinctively, and they both blushed and looked away. Neither let go.

The nighttime air was frigid, and they huddled together to keep from freezing. Both had to walk back to their respective houses, and there was a moment of hesitation before Mike said, “I’ll walk you home.”

Bill squeezed his hand. “We can w-walk to my house and I’ll drive y-you to yours,” he decided.

So they walked, sharing body heat, with Bill explaining the layout of the town. Foggy breaths formed a cloud, and laughs vibrated through each other, in an echo of their contact in the caf é . The typically long walk to Bill’s seemed to take mere seconds, and both boys were secretly disappointed that they had to separate to drive to Mike’s. Sadly, since the car had warmed them up nicely, they didn’t have an excuse to hold hands anymore. There was no more *baby it’s cold outside* to rely on, and Mike was certainly too nervous to reach back out to grasp at nimble fingers.

Bill was notorious for getting lost no matter where he drove, so in an attempt to spend more time with Mike he had skipped a few turns, stopped at stop signs for a second too long, and ignored most of what Google Maps told him to do. Usually when he did that he got horribly lost, but somehow he ended up in front of the Wheeler’s house three whole minutes sooner than predicted.

“This is me,” Mike said softly, like Bill hadn’t already pulled up to the curb and put the car in park. “I had a really good time.”

Bill wished he could make any sort of move, but he didn't. He held back, because even though there was this *electricity* between them, he knew they needed to wait. No relationship could last if it was based on a foundation as new as theirs. So, he held his tongue and reached to squeeze Mike's hand and bid him goodnight. "Have a good evening, Mike," he smiled.

A gust of cold air flew into Bill's car as Mike opened the door to leave, and it felt kind of ironic. *I'm cold without you.* Bill groaned at himself. *Shut the fuck up, edgelord.*

After watching Mike walk up his driveway and into his house and speeding home, Bill texted the groupchat. They were going to *shit their pants*. The shock at finding Richie's doppelganger crashed back into Bill at full force, and he was so perplexed he could only laugh.

richie does not eat dog poop

big billiam- FUCK

big billiam- IMDIAMA MIKE LOOKS JYSR LIKE RICHIE

big billiam- THE FIRST THINF I SAID TO HIM WAS RUXHIE
WHERE TF ARE UR GLASSRS

big billiam- he looked at me like i was Crazy

big dad ritch- wtffff

eight nights at eddies- I don't believe you...

big billiam- (selfie attachment- bill and mike)

flat stanley- WHAT THE FUCK

flat stanley- THERES ANOTER ONE

eight nights at eddies- HOLY FUCK

eight nights at eddies- IF I WASN'T WITH RICHIE RN I WOUOD

SWEAR HE WAS WITH YOU

beverly hills chihuahua- i am shitting myself

benjamin button- HOLY ISNESNNWJWKW

there's a bee?- i cannot believe this

flat stanley- im crying right now is this real life

there's a bee?- holy shit

beverly hills chihuahua- i qm actually screaming

eight nights at eddies- Oh my godddddd

big dad ritch- ?

big dad ritch- he deadass looks nothing like me

eight nights at eddies- Richie? Is you blind??

big dad ritch- without my glasses yeah lol

big dad ritch- but im wearing them rn

flat stanley- richie you two hve the same face

big dad ritch- ok lol

**big dad ritch- why are we focusing on how indiana mike looks
Nothing like me and not on how BILLS DATE WENT**

beverly hills chihuahua- oh fuck yeah

big billiam- :)

**big billiam- i spent a good most of the date internally losing my
shit and he sked what was wrong and i told him that he looks
jUST like richie**

big dad ritch- whatd he say

big billiam- he asked for a pic and i showed him and he said he didnt see it

eight nights at eddies- Dummy

big billiam- anyway after i moved past tjhat he was really sweet and funny and i stuttered a lot tbh bc a part of me still believes i just went a date with richie

big billiam- but he was very patient and we talked abt memes and vines and he is SO PRECIOUS i like this boy sm....

flat stanley- hhmmttttttt

eight nights at eddies- Hmttttt

flat stanley- first he steals MY mans name

eight nights at eddies- Then he steals MY mans face...

big billiam- more than just his face guys they are the same height same body type same hair same voice

big billiam- the only thing dfferent is the eyesight because indiana mike can see

big dad ritch- wow

eight nights at eddies- You Just said that you're blind

there's a bEe?- i still can't get past that selfie

benjamin button- ive been lookingb at it for 5 minutes

beverly hills chihuahua- I guess Will reilly has never met richie... im crying real tears rn this is crazy

Bill laughed at their reactions. *Typical.*

big billiam- would it be too headass if i called mike rn even tho i just dropped him off like 45 minutes ago

benjamin button- Call Him

there's a bEe?- yes call him be cute like that

big billiam- hehehe

Mike picked up on the first ring. "Hey stranger."

"I'm calling to s-say I sent them the selfie we took and pretty m-much all of them are crying over it," Bill said in lieu of *hello*. "Everyone but Richie knows w-we look the same."

"Richie's the only sane one, then," Mike laughed. "Also, how come they got the selfie and I didn't? I asked for it long before they did."

"Oops," Bill sniggered. "I'll s-send it now."

"I have to show *my* friends what you look like. Will's the only one who knows."

"Wait a second," Bill paused. "Will's been here for years. Bev m-mentioned that they'd never met, but h-how did he not see Richie even a little bit?"

"Maybe he did see Richie, but he has eyes that work right, and he knows we don't look the same," Mike said smugly.

"Am I going to have to f-fight you on this?" Bill sighed. "You're probably actual twins."

"Sure, whatever. Sounds fake." There was a loud *crash* from Mike's end, and he groaned. "That... was probably Holly. I should go make sure she's okay."

"Alright," Bill said, a little disappointed at how little they had been able to talk. "I hope she's alright."

"Thanks. Hey, I really had a great time today. I can't wait to see more of you." Bill blushed fiercely. "Bye, Bill."

"Talk to y-you later, Mike."

Eventually, the giddiness of the day faded away, and Bill got a little emo.

Okay, a lot emo.

He joked about it but what if he's really uncomfortable with me thinking he looks like Richie? What if he lied, hoping I would eventually agree that they look nothing alike? Maybe he won't want to date me since it could be such a mess... What if Eddie really does end up jealous?

And what did he do when he was anxious? Or nervous? Or insecure? He texted Beverly and Richie so he could get high.

big billiam, big dad ritch, beverly hills chihuahua

big billiam- can we hang out tonight

big dad ritch- sure!

big dad ritch- you ok?

beverly hills chihuahua- are we gonna smoke?

big billiam- duh

big billiam- and im ok im a little stressed i wanna talk bout stuff

big dad ritch- of coure billy im always here for you

beverly hills chihuahua- me too :)

Bill's parents were out with friends, and had taken Georgie with them, so the house was empty. It was a perfect night for half-assed communication and easy smoking, even if it was so cold outside that

they wouldn't be able to smoke much before their fingers grew numb and clumsy.

Richie and Beverly arrived soon after, sputtering up in Richie's old, loud truck. Both were empty handed. With nosy parents and a sneaky little brother, Bill had never been able to keep weed or a pipe at his house; he relied on Richie as a storage unit, basically. So why neither of them had *anything* with them was a mystery.

"Guys, I said w-we were gonna smoke," Bill whined. "Where's the s-stuff?"

"We decided that it's unhealthy to deal with every problem by getting high," Beverly said. "So we didn't bring anything."

"Oh, s-so you don't get high when y-you're stressed?" Bill rolled his eyes. "Don't be h-h-hypocrites."

"I get high when I'm stressed sometimes, yeah," Richie said, pouncing onto the couch next to Bill. "But not every time I face a problem. Like we said a few days ago, Bill, communication is important, even if you're not in a relationship. You smoke to ignore any problem, and then what? They pile up and up until you crash and burn and break down? Not good!"

Bill narrowed his eyes. "That's oddly deep," he said suspiciously.

Richie blushed and rubbed the back of his neck. "Eddie said something like that to me a bit after I first started smoking. He wanted me to stop, but knew I was having fun. He said he wouldn't be upset at me for it, but told me I had to promise to come to him with big problems instead of bottling shit up and trying to smoke it out."

"That's bullshit," Bill grumbled. "I just wanted to get h-high and forget that Mike looks exactly l-like my best friend."

"Aww, Bill," Richie ruffled his hair. "That's so sweet. But no, we're not doing anything tonight."

Beverly plopped onto Bill's other side, holding his TV's remote. "We're going to watch *Lion King* and then *Lion King 1 ½* so you can

stop being so emo, and then you're going to tell us what nonsense is running through that silly little head of yours."

Bill couldn't complain. Especially not when they were going to watch his two favorite movies. He curled deeper into the couch with a resigned sigh. "I'm not g-getting up to put it in or to make popcorn," he said glumly.

"Of course not, Billy," Richie patted his shoulder before vaulting himself over the back of the couch and into the kitchen.

Beverly turned on the TV, then got up to fiddle with the DVD player. The opening music blared suddenly, making Bill jump. "Jeez Denbrough," Beverly teased. "Why is the volume up so high? What were you watching?"

"Probaby porn," Richie said, walking in with a bag of popcorn and a handful of Kit-Kats. "Bill's secretly a freak."

"No, dumbass, it was p-probably Georgie watching *Tangled* again," Bill bit back. "Just s-sit down."

So, they sat and they watched. Beverly made them get up and dance to "Just Can't Wait to be King", Richie pretended he didn't tear up when Mufasa died, and they all screamed along to the end credits. The rest of the Denbroughs got home right as *Lion King 1 ½* began, so Georgie curled up between Bill and Richie to watch it with them. Movies were always better with Georgie around to laugh at every joke and make innocent comments. Bill enjoyed it the best he could, knowing what the end of the movie would bring.

When the credits began, Georgie was sent to bed, and Bill sunk into the couch cushions, trying to make himself invisible. An uncomfortable weight pressed down on his heart. Time to talk about his feelings. Yay.

Richie licked some popcorn butter off his fingers, ran his tongue over his front teeth, and clapped. "Well!" he exclaimed. "It's therapy time."

Bill groaned and flopped around like a child throwing a tantrum.

“Bill, you look like you’re five,” Beverly scolded. “We watched two movies and now it’s time to talk. That was the deal.”

“You brought us over here for a reason, dude,” Richie pointed out. “We’re not leaving until you stop being emo.”

“Now, why are you stressed out?” Beverly stroked Bill’s hair. “Talk to us.”

“Fine,” Bill pouted. “Ugh. It’s j-just. Okay, M-Mike looks *ex-xactly* like Richie, and I... w-well, it’s w-weird, right? It’s weird f-for me to l-like him?” His anxiety made his stutter worse, which in turn, made the weight in his chest increase. “Like, if one of y-you had a twin, it w-would be weird to l-like them, s-so why is h-he any diff-different?”

“Oh Billy,” Richie sighed, wrapping an arm around his shoulders. “It’s not weird. Honestly, I don’t see the resemblance, and neither does he, so it’s not weird for either of us. He’s probably fine with it.”

“And for those of us that actually have working eyes,” Beverly squinted at Richie, “it isn’t weird. They do look a lot alike, but they’re not actual siblings, you know.”

“Okay, but w-what about Eddie? H-he probably isn’t h-happy ab-about this,” Bill protested.

Richie’s face grew stern. “Hey, Eddie is *fine* with this, you big goof. He wants you to be happy, and would also never sabotage you like that. Even if -and that’s a big if- he did feel odd about Mike and I apparently looking the same, he wouldn’t do anything about it because he loves you.”

“And I l-love him too!” Bill exclaimed. “I w-want him to b-be comfortable! I won’t be h-happy with Mike if I know we m-make him f-feel weird.”

“That’s bullshit and you know it, Bill,” Richie said. “He won’t feel weird, and you want to be with Mike. It’s that simple.”

“Is it?” Bill asked pitifully.

“Yes,” Beverly reassured softly. “It really is that simple. You’re going

to be fine. It's all going to be fine."

The weight on his heart ebbed into just a light pressure that Bill knew would only be lifted with time. At least it had lessened some. "Thanks, guys," he whispered. "I love y-you both."

"We love you too!" Richie shoved his face into Bill's hair obnoxiously, and Beverly threw herself across them, forcing the trio into a group hug.

"You'll be alright," she said, her voice muffled by Bill's shoulder. "I believe in you."

"Do you want us to stay the night?" Richie asked, extracting himself from the hug. "I don't mind."

"Me neither," Beverly said. "I don't have work until 11 tomorrow."

Bill almost said yes, but honestly, he wanted some time to process by himself. "You two go h-home. I'll be f-fine alone tonight." He smiled. "Thanks, though."

"Sure thing, dude." Richie stood up and stretched. As he reached up, his back made a loud *pop* and he let out a loud "Fuck!"

"Richie!" Bill admonished. "My parents are probably s-still up!"

"Sorry, sorry," Richie said, hushedly. "I'll go now. C'mon, Bev."

Bull ushered them out of his house. He watched them drive away into the cold night, before closing the door and heading to his room.

About an hour after Beverly and Richie left, Bill got texts from both Ben and Eddie.

private message - big billiam and benjamin button

benjamin button- hey

benjamin button- i know it must be weird to like a guy who

looks just like richie

benjamin button- but i say if you like him, if he's good for you, go for it <3 eddie won't be upset at all and richie won't either

big billiam- thank you ben you're a true friend

big billiam- it did feel a bit weird idk what's gonna happen but i like him and i think he likes me???

big billiam- so fingers crossed

benjamin button- fingers crossed

It was a sweet gesture, no doubt a product of Beverly telling him why Bill had been down combined with Ben's natural kindness. Bill was definitely touched, and he loved Ben with his whole heart, but Eddie's texts made him a little more emotional.

private message - big billiam and eight nights at eddies

eight nights at eddies- I really don't mind that he looks just like Richie you should still date him

eight nights at eddies- If you want to. He has my blessing. Richie's too.

eight nights at eddies- I am gonna cook you in the group chat 24/7 though because this is hilarious

big billiam- <3<3<3<3

Richie wasn't the type to reveal details about someone without explicit permission, so Eddie had to have made the connection that Bill was worried about what Eddie thought all by himself, and then wanted to make his acceptance concrete. Bill wished he could

respond more eloquently, or thank Eddie better, but he could only get a few hearts out. Anything more and he'd cry.

Even though there was a deep set weariness in Bill's bones, it was a sleepless night. His emotions were heightened and his thoughts ran amok, not allowing him to rest. With just the dim light from his lamp and the flickering glow of a candle, Bill pulled out his sketchbook and drew whatever his mind told him. He quickly realized he was drawing Mike.

Drawing Richie had always been easy. Big nose, big teeth, spots of freckles, wild hair, laughter lines, mischievous eyes, done. Drawing Mike felt worlds different. Richie was harsh, Mike was soft. Richie was obscene, Mike was kind. Even though Bill was drawing the exact same face he had drawn countless times before, it was a new experience. He poured love into his work, his dark brown pencil traced each line carefully, each stroke deliberately, and each contour delicately. Yet, no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't quite capture the sparkle in Mike's eyes, or the emotion in his expression, and in the end piece felt... bland. It was a result of a drained heart and an exhausted brain.

Bill set the sketchbook aside, disappointed, and dragged his hands down his face. After blowing out his candle, he fell asleep. The lamp remained on, illuminating the room, and kept any bad dreams at bay.

He laid awake for a long while, thinking, staring at the muted color of his sad version of Mike. Eventually, he drifted off, and dreamt of a day, in the distant future, when he would be happy.

Notes for the Chapter:

s/o to my beta PAIGE whomst i would die without
she made this 10000x better what a queen

also s/o 2 the discord server! for wheelbrough! there
are almost 60 ppl in it and whenever someone joins,
Some People like to go against my wishes and
scream FLESH JUICE at them, so if u wanna join,,, be
warned. invite link ---> <https://discord.gg/QP8PWTz>

comments... are good

4. Mike

Summary for the Chapter:

November had never been a good month for Mike Wheeler.

Notes for the Chapter:

alternatively titled, "Mike is an Emo Bitch" bc he is so emo.

i have a few more mike chapters kinda planned so i hope yall like him !! i miss bill tho, hes also an emo bitch but differently and i hope it wont take 2 weeks to write his next chapter lol

this bitch almost 8k tho lol

November had never been a good month for Mike. When he was younger, he'd often wake up November 1st with a runny nose and a pounding headache and his mom saying, "Really, Michael, I told you that your Superman costume wasn't warm enough." He'd be forced to stay in bed while his friends went to school and showed off their loot, trading hard strawberry candies for chocolate and nougat. Looking back, it all seemed so trivial compared to what he had gone through as a teen, but it set a precedent for the poor quality of the month.

Will disappeared a few days into November of seventh grade, and there was a solid week of chaos and lies and conspiracies. Mike found he really liked Eleven but he also *really* missed Will- and apparently he could only have one. That November was the worst.

In eighth grade, Will wasn't doing well. Dustin and Lucas were focused on some new girl, Max. Eleven was still gone. Nothing was going right. Then, in early November, Will was possessed, and Mike had some of the the most emotional days of his life. Amidst the shock of nearly losing his best friend and the joyous return of Eleven, he never got a chance to stop and really process what he had gone through. The rest of that school year was spent in a hazy, depressed

state that not even Eleven's presence or Steve's counseling could help.

November of ninth grade somehow hurt worse than either experience with the Upside-Down had. Joyce Byers announced that she and her family were moving to Derry, Maine, and Mike suddenly lost Will all over again. Soon after, Eleven decided she wasn't cut out to have any sort of romantic relationship. Then, Max and Lucas broke up. In one fell swoop, life took Mike's best friend, his girlfriend, and a comfortable relationship between two of his closest friends. He felt as if the world was collapsing in on itself. His friend group, somehow, remained intact. Eventually Mike was pulled out of his mind, but not until after he had broken down on the edge of the quarry too many times to count.

On Thanksgiving of sophomore year, Karen and Ted Wheeler announced their impending divorce. Mike was happy for his mom; she had married an older man per instructions of her parents, and even though she never loved him, she had had three kids with him and did the best she could to provide a happy life for them. Unfortunately, his mom was asking for full custody, and his dad had acquiesced and merely requested early visitation rights. Karen also had no intention of remaining in Hawkins. Mike feared the worst. She could move them to a big city with fast cars and thousands of people where they would all feel overwhelmingly out of place; even worse, she could decide on a new small town, and force Mike to be the new kid in a high school where everyone already knew everyone. Mike broke the news to his friends a few days later. Eleven cried, Dustin and Lucas looked wearier and sadder than Mike had seen them in a long time, and Max just seemed... lost, like she was the one whose life was changing so drastically. In a way, Mike supposed, she was right. His moving affected everyone; the Wheeler house would no longer be the meeting spot, El had trusted him more than anyone else in the group, Dustin and Lucas were losing another best friend, and Max's basically brand new friend group was shrinking. Mike wished so badly to just *stay* , but he couldn't control what his mother did.

Karen decided to move to Derry midway through March the next year, and Mike actually became excited to leave. His friends became gradually less upset due to the prospect of being able to visit him *and* Will in one trip.

They didn't move until Mike's junior year. In all honesty, he dreaded going to Derry. Sure, Will lived there, and he was excited to live near him again, and he had started to get to know a boy named Bill and his friends, but he still yearned to stay in the comfort of Hawkins. He knew who he was in Hawkins. He was Mike Wheeler, paladin, nerd, member of The Party, a friend of Zombie Boy Byers (that nickname lingered even after Will left, much to everyone's disappointment), member of AV Club, Steve Harrington's kid. But when he moved to Derry, all of that would vanish. The Party stayed in Hawkins, Will had no reputation on Derry, his new high school didn't have an AV Club, and Steve could only advise him from afar. Everything he knew about himself would be washed away and that blank slate was terrifying.

Packing up his room was heartbreaking. Each item Mike pressed into a neatly confined cardboard box was stripped of its meaning, stripped of its memory, forced to become something new in a way that he related to all too well. The dinosaur figurine Eleven had been fascinated with became a dumb toy that'd rest on his shelf for Richie to tease him over; the *Millennium Falcon* model she had levitated just took up box space and would likely be gifted or sold within weeks of moving. All his sweaters, tied to places like Will's bedroom, or the Snow Ball, or long stretches of road he explored on his bike, became plain tops that Bill could see as fun fashion choices. His old walkie-talkie... Mike had to sit down and blink away tears when he found the bulky black radio buried in the back of his closet. Before cell phones, before the Upside Down, the walkie-talkie he had gripped in his shaking hands was his *childhood*. It was talking to Lucas at early hours of the morning, Lucas then relaying messages to Dustin, Will whispering so his mom couldn't hear him. It was proof that Will was still alive when he sang the Clash song he and Jonathan loved, giving Mike hope when he thought there was none. It was calling Eleven every day, for 353 days, a pit of despair carving ever deeper in his heart when no reply came. In Hawkins, it had a whole meaning. In Derry, it was useless. Just like Mike.

The analogy felt ridiculous. Mike felt ridiculous. It was just moving. He had friends in Derry. His Hawkins friends would visit. It would all be okay.

So why did it feel like the world was ending again?

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Moving day was chaotic. The Wheelers loaded most of their boxes into the big moving truck Karen had gotten the night before. They had to leave first thing in the morning so they could get to Derry before it was too dark. Nancy had suggested flying, but Karen had been worried about money. Driving it was.

Mike called Bill a few hours after leaving Hawkins. The scenery they passed flew by in streaks of red and brown and yellow, Nancy had her seat leaned back too far, and Holly asked a relentless stream of nonsensical questions that nearly drove Mike up the wall. Bill didn't answer. Mike closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths to calm himself. *It's fine* he reasoned, *Bill is probably still asleep*. In the meantime, he reclined his seat as far back as the suitcases in the back seats would allow, and slipped into a restless sleep.

Around noon, Mike woke up to french fries and a Big Mac being shoved in his lap. "Lunch time," Nancy said through a mouthful of her own food. "I ordered for your lazy ass."

"Language, Nancy," Karen sighed. "Watch your mouth around Holly, please."

"Sorry mom," Nancy said, not sounding very sorry at all. She winked at Mike as she settled back in her seat.

Mike ate his lunch slowly, limbs still half asleep and eyes still drooping in a haze. By the time he finished, an hour had passed, and his fries had gone cold. A soft *ding* from his phone snapped him into full consciousness. Bill had texted him.

big billiam- hey you called me earlier but i was not awake and missed it. are you still down to call?

Instead of texting back, Mike smiled and called Bill. "Did you just

wake up?” He laughed, as if he hadn’t slept a good chunk of the day away as well.

“Yep,” Bill said, voice raspy. “Had a r-rager last night. Got too lit.” He snorted. “That’s a lie, it wasn’t a r-rager. Just me and the c-crew.”

Talking to Bill was so *easy*. Their conversation flowed with no awkward pauses, no long silences, and Mike somehow knew exactly what Bill needed to hear when he grew noticeably hesitant. The phone call had a... slight hiccup when Mike had to explain furies to his mother, but Bill seemed amused, and Mike loved hearing him laugh. Nancy stole his phone a few times, probably made Bill uncomfortable, but Mike figured it was best to expose Bill to his meddling sister as soon as possible.

When Richie, Eddie, Stan, and other Mike barged in on their call, bellowing out Lil Jon’s rap in the “Cooking by the Book” remix, Mike felt a warmth bloom in his heart. He didn’t need to be nervous about meeting the Losers in real life; they were just a bunch of teenagers who loved memes, just like his friends back in Hawkins.

Bill was stolen away for a movie, and Mike hung up with a wide grin. Nancy was turned around in her seat, watching him with sparkling eyes and a quirk to her lips. “Shut up,” he told her, embarrassed.

“I haven’t said anything!” she laughed. “But I will say, you look really happy, and he sounds really nice, and I’m really proud of you.”

Mike flushed.

“I don’t know anything about this boy,” Karen piped up, glancing at Mike through the rearview mirror. “Are you sure he’s who he says he is, Michael?”

“Yes, mom.” Mike rolled his eyes. “Will knows him. I don’t think he’d try to set me up with some catfish. Even if he did try, he wouldn’t be able to lie to me for that long.”

“If you’re sure, honey,” she sighed.

“He’s legit, mom. I talked to him,” Nancy assured. “We’ll probably get to know him real soon, going off of how red Mike is right now. So

cute!" She reached to pinch his cheeks, but he batted away her hands.

"Stop making fun of me," he whined. "He's nice."

"Yeah, I hope so." Nancy's eyes grew serious. "In all honesty, I love seeing you this happy, Mike. I know moving has been hard, but at least you have him. I am proud of you." Holly stopped babbling and looked over at her siblings, but neither noticed the silence. Nancy continued. "After everything we've been through, you deserve someone like him."

"Thanks, Nance," Mike said quietly. "You deserve to be with Jonathan again."

Karen was watching the road intently, but Mike could see how her eyes watered, and felt her happiness. He almost wished she couldn't hear him and Nancy, but she could, and she was content with their joy.

Nancy turned back around in her seat, and Mike told himself, *it's going to be okay*, and believed it.

The drive wore on, and the warmth dissipated into boredom, until a large sign reading *Welcome to Derry* appeared in his vision.

All thoughts of Bill flew from Mike's mind as they crossed the border into Derry. Will was minutes away. He, Joyce, and Jonathan had all gathered at the new Wheeler residence, ready to help them unpack and settle into their new lives. The prospect of seeing Will for the first time in months, and the reunion not being darkened with the knowledge of how short their visit would be, had Mike practically vibrating in his seat.

"Mike, chill," Nancy teased, but he could see her excitement as well. It had been months since she had last seen Jonathan.

When they pulled into the driveway of their new house, Mike unbuckled his seatbelt and bolted from the car before his mom had even put it in park. Will was there, standing on the front porch of a beautiful home, and Mike was so happy he felt he could burst.

“Will!” Mike shouted as he raced up the steps. They met in a crashing hug, jumping, laughing, spinning. “Wow!” he laughed, breathless, stepping back to take in his best friend. “You grew like, a centimeter!”

Will punched his arm playfully, pulling Mike back into a hug. “Wow, Mike!” he giggled. “You grew like, an attitude!”

“Oh, he’s had an attitude for years,” Karen interjected happily as she walked past the two boys, Holly holding her hand. “It’s not anything he’s grown recently.”

“Mom,” Mike gaped, faux-scandalized. Will just laughed more.

“Yeah, drag him Mrs. Wheeler!”

“Oh shut up, William!” But Mike couldn’t even be fake mad. Seeing Will again made him too happy.

“Go get some stuff and take it inside,” Nancy said as she walked up the steps of the porch and bumped Mike with her hip. “Both of you.” Jonathan trailed inside behind her.

So Mike and Will hauled a few boxes inside, making sure to only grab those with Mike’s name scrawled on the top. It was pretty late, so they only brought up what was necessary, like blankets and pillows and old toys to laugh over. Joyce helped to set up Mike’s bed, and allowed Will to stay the night.

“Are you boys sure you don’t want to come stay at our house?” she had asked.

“No thanks, mom,” Will replied. “I wanna stay here to help Mike get settled.”

“Alright then,” Joyce laughed, and ruffled their hair. “Goodnight you two. Stay safe, sweetheart.”

“I will, mom.” Will rolled his eyes as Joyce left the room, but he was still smiling. “She’s always so worried about me,” he told Mike.

“For good reason, though,” Mike reasoned. “At least we have tonight together!”

Will opened one of the boxes strewn about the room and pulled out an old photograph booklet. When he opened it, the first picture was of Mike, Will, Dustin, and Lucas on Halloween in elementary school. "Wow," he breathes, tracing their round faces. "Our costumes were so bad," he snorted.

Mike shifted closer to Will, peering at the picture. The four of them were dressed as power rangers, but were really just wearing monochrome outfits with paper cut into a diamond shape taped onto their shirts. "I remember that year," Mike said. "We didn't decide on a costume until the night before. My mom was so mad at me for just wearing a t-shirt and jeans."

"My mom too," Will laughed. "She's always been so cautious with me."

Mike flipped to the next picture. It showed Will and Dustin in matching Christmas sweaters, holding giant mugs of hot chocolate. The date on the bottom read *Dec, 24, 2012*. "The last good Christmas," Will sighed.

Mike elbowed him. "It was not the last good one. We've had good Christmases since then, man."

"You mean the one where I puked up a weird slug lizard? Or the next one, where I was still recovering from being actually possessed? Or maybe the year after that, when you five were all together in Hawkins and I was here, alone, with just my mom and brother?" Will blinked back tears and covered the picture with his hand. "It was the last good one, with all of us together on the actual day."

There was a long silence as Mike debated on how to respond. Finally, he settled on, "Well, this year you have me, and maybe they'll come and visit us! Plus, you can get to know Bill and Bev and all their friends better, right?"

Will shrugged and wiped his eyes. "I guess. Sorry about that."

"Don't be sorry. I didn't know you still felt bad about stuff." Mike frowned. "We'll have to talk about this more later."

“Ugh.” Will deflated a little, but nodded. “Whatever. Let’s look at more pictures.”

They continued flipping, finding an odd assortment of photos. There were some from a Fourth of July picnic with the four of them running around with sparklers, some from awkward school dances where none of them had dates and simply stood with each other. There was one from eighth grade graduation, with Mike and El holding hands, Lucas and Max with arms wrapped around each other, and Dustin and Will standing in the middle, smiling and laughing. They all looked so young and pure, even though they had all been through a lot of shit just a few months prior. “Hopper was so pissed about El wanting to come see us graduate,” Mike laughed quietly. “He said that the Snow Ball had been a big enough risk, but she demanded to come watch us have some dumb middle school ceremony.”

“It was a bit stupid for her to go, though,” Will reasoned. “It hadn’t been a year, and she was still kind of in danger.”

“But look how happy she is,” Mike said wistfully. “We’re all so happy here.”

Will bit his lip and looked at Mike. “Do you still... have feelings for her?” he asked. “For El?”

Mike shook his head. “Nah. I mean, she was my first love, and all that jazz, but it really was best that we broke up. Even though I felt like shit at the time, it was what we needed.”

“Now you have Bill,” Will teased.

“Now I have Bill,” Mike agreed, not giving into the teasing. “I’m really excited to meet him.”

“Tomorrow, right? At my coffeeshop?”

“Yep. Twelve o’clock sharp, at the corner table with sunflowers painted on it.”

“Ah, the Losers table.” Will nodded. “They go there a lot, but I honestly never pay much attention. Richie is really loud, but he

always sends Eddie up to order for him. Or Bev. I don't think I've ever spoken to him, actually."

"That's odd," Mike laughed. "He reminds me of Dustin, a bit. All loud and dramatic, plus he curses a lot. I won't miss Dustin if Richie's around!"

"I can't believe you already know them better than I do, and I've lived here for, like, years." Then Will shrugged. "It's whatever. I'll force myself into their lives now that you're friends with them. I already know Bev and Ben and like them enough. The others shouldn't be too bad."

"I think you'll like Stan and other Mike," Mike said. "They're both really nice and funny."

"Well now I guess I have to get to know them," Will joked as he flipped to another picture. "Aw, this is from when I moved."

"Look at El," Mike laughed, pointing to the background of the photo where El was using her powers to move books into boxes.

"I did not even notice that," Will giggled. "I'm paying more attention to you and Lucas being dumb."

The center of the picture showed Mike fitting Lucas into a large, empty cardboard box. Lucas appeared to be struggling to get out of the box, and Mike seemed to be struggling to shove him into the box. Both boys were laughing, and Dustin could be seen lying next to them on the ground, blurry from how hard he was laughing.

"I think I was trying to shove him in there so he could be shipped off to Derry with you," Mike snorted. "He did not want to be in that box."

"It's understandable," Will said. "Derry is pretty crappy."

Mike peered at Will. He had never mentioned not liking Derry, not beyond missing his friends, anyway. "I didn't know you don't like it here."

Will grimaced. "It's not that I don't like it, it's just that it feels..."

weird here sometimes. I don't know how to explain it. It's whatever."

The way Will brushed off his worry was alarming, but Mike knew better than to pry, or treat Will like he was fragile. Derry did feel a bit odd, if Mike really thought about it, but not enough for concern. Not yet, at least.

"Well, I promised the guys that we'd skype them tonight. El really wants to see my new room," Mike said, breaking the silence. "They're probably available right now."

Will looked relieved at the subject change. "Get out your laptop and see if they're on."

Skype *zoookoom-plip* ed its way to life, and as soon as Mike switched his presence status to online, he was getting a call from Lucas' Skype account. *I guess it makes sense Lucas' place would be the new hangout central*, he thought, a little bitter.

El, Lucas, Dustin, and Max had popped up on screen while he was busy being angsty, and the sight of all his friends jockeying for the best position around Lucas' laptop banished all of it. His smile was so big it was probably embarrassing. However, there was a face missing he had been looking forwards to seeing.

"Is Steve here?" Mike asked hopefully.

Max shook her head. "No, he has his stupid job tonight. Hopper wouldn't let him take off to talk to us."

"Aww." Mike slumped. "Well, tell him Nance and I miss him next time you see him, alright?"

"Duh," Dustin scoffed. "He's so pissed he can't be here. He wants to see your new room."

"I do too," El said from the bottom corner of the screen. "Is it big?"

Mike shrugged. "It's pretty much the same as Hawkins. Just... more boxes."

From there, the conversation flowed into a typical Party

conversation. For hours they talked about everything and nothing. Max went on and on about a new skate trick she learned until El cut in to talk about the developments of her own powers. Dustin told Mike that his mom was already considering adopting another cat to make up for Mike's absence. Lucas, as always, whined about his sister when he had to inevitably shoo her away from his room. *Doesn't Bill have a little brother?* Mike thought, momentarily distracted from his friends' antics by the thought of his potential new man. *George, or something like that.*

"MIKE!"

Hearing his name practically yelled in his ear snapped him out of his trance. He blushed, realizing he had let himself get so caught up in thoughts of Bill's *little brother*, not even *Bill himself*, he had ignored the Party. "Sorry guys," he mumbled, "Got a stuck in my own head for a moment."

"Wait," Lucas said, squinting at his screen. "Are you *blushing*? Will, confirm!"

Mike groaned and buried his face in his hands while Will poked and prodded at his cheeks.

"Yep, thats definitely a blush, guys. His cheeks always lit up like this when we caught him staring at El, remember?"

"Wow, I wonder *who in the world* could have Will blushing like that ? Could it be this Bill character Mike won't shut up about?" Max teased.

"I hate you." Mike groaned, and tried to bury his face even deeper into his hands.

"I think it's cute," El smiled. "If he makes you happy, it's good."

"Thanks, *El* ." Mike glared at Will, then Lucas. "At least I have one friend who cares about me."

At that, everyone around him began defending themselves, saying *It is cute, I'm just teasing!* and *Don't be such a drama queen Mike I'm just taking the piss! He better be nice though!* and *I care about you but you*

look dumb with your face all red like that.

Hearing everyone babble over each other from the pixelated screen made Mike more emotional than he'd expected. They'd only be able to communicate via internet for the next... well, who knew how long. How Will had survived two years of being the only one at the other end of the screen was a total mystery.

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When Mike inevitably brought up Bill, *again*, he was met with a cacophony of groans. "You're not gonna be all emo about him after you've met, right?" Lucas asked. "I know too much about this guy for you to have not even met him."

"They're meeting tomorrow for coffee," Will said. "Nancy told me that they talked on the phone in the car today. She said that Bill made Mike explain furries to his mom."

Dustin let out a snort and clapped. "You had to explain furries to Karen! Oh man, dude, that's rough."

"It was embarrassing! Shut up! Will," Mike elbowed him. "When did you talk to Nancy?"

Shrugging faux-innocently, Will said, "We text each other sometimes. One such time being during your call."

"I am... betrayed." Mike hung his head dramatically. "Friendship ended with Will Byers."

Will looked at the laptop and sighed wistfully. "Half a day in Derry and he's already leaving us for Bill and his friends. I can't believe it."

That set off another jumble of talking and laughter as Mike jumped to refute Will, and as the others went off on their own exaggerated laments. Max spoke so melodramatically that Will laughed until tears dripped down his red cheeks, and Mike until his stomach ached.

Eventually, Mike noticed Will falling asleep on his shoulder, so he called it a night. "It's been a long day, guys, sorry. Goodnight. We'll talk you you tomorrow, though," he promised.

“You *better* talk to us tomorrow,” Dustin threatened.

“Go to sleep, numbnuts,” Max laughed. “Will’s already dead to the world.”

Lucas smirked. “We don’t want you tired for your little date tomorrow,” he teased.

Mike blushed furiously. “Shut up Lucas. I’m hanging up now.”

“Good luck, Mike,” El said right as Mike went to hang up.

He paused long enough to say, “Thanks, El. Night,” before closing his laptop.

As Will let out a stream of soft snores, Mike laid him down on the bed and tucked him in before putting away the laptop and laying down himself. A soft, content happiness coursed through his veins and made his heart thrum against his ribs in the best way. There was Will, there were his friends, and there was Bill, the next day. So he was calm. Calm, until he rolled over and raked his eyes over the stacks of boxes in his empty room. There was no life to the space yet; the atmosphere was drab, depressing, almost menacing. The warm sensations dimmed to something akin to a cold breeze; Mike shivered.

I thought I could do this. Maybe I can do this, Mike thought as he closed his eyes, blocking out the spread of worthless nothings before him. *I don’t think I can do this*.

His sleep was fitful. Nightmares of a looming figure with sharp teeth and glowing eyes plagued him all through the night. They were different than normal nightmares. Dreams of the Demogorgon and of demo-dogs were all replays. They all showed his worst fears of the time, developing to his worst fears in his present. Dozens of variations of Will’s death, of El’s death, of Steve’s, Nancy’s, Lucas’, Dustin’s, and Max’s deaths. New endings where Hawkins Lab won and El was taken again. Changes where Will really was found in the quarry that day, that Mike had never experienced the trauma of the Upside Down but *had* really lost his best friend. But this dream? Those glowing eyes? The Demogorgon didn’t even *have* eyes. The

new monster was a dark, threatening figure that ate up his happiness and fed on his fear. If any joy from the Skype had lingered, it was quickly snatched away, and a heavy knot formed in Mike's stomach as he slept.

Morning came, and brought with it sweet forgetfulness. The nightmares were faint feelings niggling in the back of Mike's head. He paid his odd ideas no mind; his thoughts were bizarre in nature more often than not. Besides, a made believe dream Boogeyman did not pose as much a threat as his impending *date with Bill*.

"Stop being so nervous," Will grumbled, head shoved into a pillow. "Your stupid leg is shaking the bed."

Mike glanced down at his friend from where he sat, propped up against the wall, and noticed his figure moving slightly. Then he noticed his own bouncing leg. "Sorry." He stopped.

Groaning, Will lifted his head and rolled over. "Don't apologize, idiot. You're nervous. It's okay." He rubbed a hand down his sleep swollen cheeks. "What time is it anyway?"

"Ten twenty-eight," Mike answered, with no hesitation. "I should be there in an hour and a half."

"You'll be fine," Will said, smacking his lips together sleepily.

"You're driving me, right?" Mike asked anxiously. "I don't know where to go, actually."

"Ooh." Will cringed as he sat up. "I have a study group thing at 11:45."

Blood rushed from Mike's face. "But it's fall break!"

"I still need to do well in school!" Will protested. "I would totally drive you but this group is really important." He placed a gentle hand on Mike's thigh and smiled apologetically. "You're going to be fine. I'll help you with directions."

"I'm going to get lost."

"Don't be so whiny," Will scolded. "Get up and we can go make breakfast. I'll even help you get dressed if you hurry."

"I don't know why I'd want fashion advice from your gay ass. You are *definitely* not a fashion queer." Mike muttered, but he was already clambering out of his bed, shivering when his feet touched the cold floor. *I hate everything.*

Nerves built up in Mike's stomach all through breakfast. The only food they had was cereal and stale chips left over from the long drive the day prior. There wasn't even any milk. Will sighed in disappointment at the empty pantry. "We probably should have gone to my house," he said. "We could have actual breakfast."

But they were at Mike's, so Will poured fruity pebbles into the single bowl that had been unpacked and grabbed a handful of chips as Mike ate the cereal straight from the bag. Breakfast of champions.

"Good thing you can eat at the coffeeshop," Will said dryly. "This is just sad."

Mike shrugged. "If I'm honest, I'd probably throw up if I actually ate. This is all my bitch ass stomach can handle right now."

"Aww, are you really that nervous?"

"Yes!" Mike exclaimed. "I have no idea what this kid looks like or what he acts like or who he is really! I just know him over text!" He buried his hands in his hair and leaned back in his chair. "What if I walk up and say something stupid and he realizes he doesn't like me?" Then he suddenly straightened his chair and slammed his elbows onto the table, making Will's bowl shake. "What if he doesn't know that we were introduced to be more than friends Will? You told Beverly that you were talking Bill up so we could *date*, right?"

Will sighed. "Yes, Michael, Bill knows you're *talking* talking. He doesn't think he's made just a new friend. Really, if Bev was gonna introduce someone to her friends to add to the group, it'd be me because, you know, I've lived here for years."

Mike slumped. "That's fair," he admitted. "Still, a whole lot could go wrong."

"It won't," Will said with finality. "Don't stress about this." He scooped the last of his dry cereal into his mouth and stood. "Now

come on, we have to go through your boxes to find something suitable for your *date*. ”

Mike was dragged into his room and ordered to open the boxes containing his clothes. It was disheartening to see Will rummaging through piles of sweaters that Mike associated with Hawkins, knowing that Will was seeing them for the first time. However, new city, new home, new memories, and Mike hoped that his first real moment in Derry would be good enough to leave an imprint (the first of many) in him and his clothes. Will eventually pulled out a knit sweater with a fruit bowl on the front and gave Mike a deadpan stare. “A fruit sweater? Really?”

“I love that sweater!” Mike complained. “It’s warm and it’s fun. I should wear i-”

“No.” Will shook his head vehemently. “You cannot wear this the first time you meet Bill. I’ve seen his fashion sense, he’s *tame*, You can’t start off with the freaking fruit sweater, Michael.”

Mike raised his hands defensively. “Alright then man, I won’t.”

“Just...” Will trailed off as he pulled another sweater from the box. “Just wear this.”

He brandished a sweatshirt that was solid black save for a small embroidered rainbow over the heart. Mike had forgotten about that sweatshirt.

“Wow,” he breathed, taking it from Will’s grasp. “I haven’t worn this since Nancy drove Max and I to the Chicago pride parade last year.” “Why not?” Will asked softly.

Mike bit his lip. “Nobody in Hawkins really accepts... gays... except for our friends and my mom. There was already enough suspicion going around about Max because she cut her hair, and I didn’t want to fuel the flames by wearing this.”

Will grinned, and pressed the sweatshirt closer to Mike. “You can wear it here,” he promised. “You can be out in Derry.”

And that was a factor Mike had never thought about. Hawkins was

small, and close minded, and unwilling to change. Derry was northern, Derry was bigger, Derry was growing, Derry was a place where Mike could be and like who he wanted. *That's a plus to moving, I suppose.*

So Mike went to his new, barren bathroom and pulled on the sweatshirt. It was liberating.

When Mike left the bathroom, Will was gone, and his phone said it was 11:32 am. He pulled on some plain black jeans, and his tennis shoes, and headed down the stairs to the living room. Will was talking with Jonathan and Nancy, who looked up when she heard Mike enter. "Hey Mike," she smiled. "You look nice."

Mike was sure he didn't; messy hair and all black wasn't his best look. "Thanks, Nance," he said anyways.

"You look emo," Jonathan laughed. He stood and walked to a stack of boxes, where his denim jacket was draped. "Wear this over that." He tossed to jacket to Mike.

"Are you sure?" Mike asked.

"Of course," Jonathan said kindly. "It'll work together."

Mike shrugged on the jacket, pocketed his phone, money, brand-new keys, and looked at Will expectantly. "Are you gonna give me directions or what?"

"Yeah, yeah." Will clambered to his feet and headed to the door, Mike trailing behind him. "I'll point in the direction it's in and you can use Google Maps for the rest of it. Give me your phone, I'll put in the address."

Google Maps said that the walk would only be about fifteen minutes, but Mike was still worried about being late, so he left over twenty minutes early; he was notorious for being late, and didn't want to mess up his time with Bill. He yelled a *Bye Mom!* as he opened his front door. The cold air of Maine hit he and Will like an icy brick wall. "Holy shit," Mike cursed, shoving his hands deeper into the pockets of Jonathan's jacket. "It wasn't this cold in Hawkins yesterday."

“Maine is colder,” Will said. Then he pointed to the left, said, “It’s that way,” and sent him off with a pat to his back and wishes of luck.

During his walk, Mike took in the sights of Derry. The street names, the houses, the neighborhoods. The route he was on went alongside a fairly busy road, lined with fast food restaurants, gas stations, and convenience stores. Mike noted he was a five minute walk from a Walgreens. Overall, it looked like a nice town, but it felt foreign, and empty, and almost... pointless, without his friends. Even with Jonathan’s jacket it was still cold, so Mike sped up, looking forwards to the warmth of the coffeeshop. It had to be close by now, right?

The coffeeshop stood out in its shopping center. The brick was painted a pale yellow, and there were posters plastered all over the glass doors. As Mike crossed the street to reach the door, the aroma of coffee permeated through the air, and grew stronger the closer he got. When he entered, a bell above the door rang sweetly, and the warm air welcomed him. Something about the atmosphere made Mike feel content, at home. Sitting in the far corner, by a clean window, was a round table with sunflowers painted delicately across the top. Small nicks adorned the edges, and there was a long, faint scratch down the center. Mike liked the visible history.

A waitress came up to Mike as he sat down, asking if he wanted anything. “I’m waiting for a friend,” he told her.

“Of course you are,” she smiled. “I’ll be around when he gets here.” She winked at him before walking away.

Mike was a little unnerved by the waitress, and pulled out his phone to text his friends an update on his day. Halfway through complaining about the cold, the bell above the door sounded again. Whoever entered paused for a moment before stomping in Mike’s direction, but he was too focused on his text to turn around. However, when a figure reached his side and began yelling at him, he looked up.

“Richie, where the fuck are your glasses? Actually, I don’t wanna know. If you wanted to creep in on my date with Mike, you could have at least sat at a different table and done more to disguise yourself. You’re not fooling anyone,” a tall boy with light brown hair

and angry blue eyes snarled. “Go the fuck home, and tell Eddie I’m disappointed in him for playing along with your stupid little game, when he should know better.”

It suddenly clicked in Mike’s head. “Bill?” he asked, because, who else?

Even without the stutter, that had somehow vanished for those few moments, Mike could recognize Bill’s voice. His looks were also fitting; tall, but not taller than Mike, slim, handsome, sharp jawline, soft hair. His outfit, *floral pants and a green sweater*, made Mike wish he had worn his fruit sweater. *Oh well*, he thought. *I’ll wear it for another date.*

“Richie.” The boy, presumably Bill, tapped his foot impatiently and pointed to the door. “Out.”

Mike had no idea why he was being called Richie. He was sure Bill would know the difference between a guy he’d never met before, and one of his closest friends. Nonetheless he clarified that he was Mike and not, in fact, Richie. Bill didn’t believe him at first, but Mike saw the moment that his eyes widened in recognition, and how his cheeks flushed.

Turns out, Bill thought Mike and Richie looked the exact same. Mike saw a picture, but didn’t see the resemblance. The whole situation was bizarre, and Mike made a mental note to ask Will about Richie.

Bill wanted a selfie, for proof of Mike and Richie’s similarity, so Mike moved to sit next to Bill. *Next to* ended up meaning *practically on top of*. One they were settled, the same flirty waitress from earlier came back and took their orders. She flirted with Mike, which he found odd, since he was very obviously on a date. With a guy. Said guy had been sitting half in Mike’s lap, their arms pressed together, their ankles millimeters apart. And still, she flirts with him. Bill was upset about the flirting, but Mike was more focused on her calling him *Richie*, because that was the most baffling part of their encounter.

When they were given their drinks, she flirted, *again*, and stormed off in a huff when Bill tried explaining that Mike was not, in fact, Richie. *Can’t win them all*, Mike thought, as he took a sip of his coffee.

The whipped cream piled on the top of Mike's latte stuck to the tip of his nose, and he looked to Bill when he felt it stick. It suddenly hit Mike how close they really were. Bill was so clear that Mike could almost count his eyelashes. He could also see the glow in Bill's eyes as he raised a napkin to wipe Mike's nose. They stared at each other, silently, intensely, and somehow the simple act of wiping whipped cream away felt intimate and meaningful. To Mike, it almost felt like the world stopped turning.

Bill lowered the napkin slowly, not breaking the hot gaze, and Mike thought that maybe something would happen, but the bell that had been so welcoming when he arrived twinkled again and dulled the mood.

Mike saw Bill in a different light after that. The late fall sunlight graced across Bill's cheekbones, highlighting his sharp jawline. Bill ate his muffin like a starving animal, gorging it from the top with giant bites. He liked to hold his face over the steam coming from his coffee, presumably warming his nose, that was still pink after being inside for what felt like hours. And what turned out to actually be hours. Even through waxing wistfully over Bill during the golden hour (glowing, gold, angelic) Mike didn't think of the time.

But before he knew it, they were being asked to leave, as the shop was closing. Mike was shocked. Was it really that late? Was it really *dark*?

It really was that late, and it really was that dark, and Derry was even colder at night. Mike dreaded his walk home; he wished he could drive, or call someone to pick him up, but neither options were viable. When Bill realized that Mike had no ride home, he said "We can w-walk to my house and I'll drive y-you to yours," confidently.

So they walked to Bill's together, Mike listening intently to Bill telling stories about landmarks they passed. Derry became a different city with Bill's descriptions. A simple CVS became the store they stole from as kids to help a bleeding Ben; the Taco Bell on a corner became the Taco Bell where Beverly threw up in the bushes as Richie and Eddie fucked in a car after they had all gotten high in their tiny bathroom. Small places that looked insignificant bloomed with meanings and memories. Mike's anxiety over moving lessened as he

took in the city differently.

They held hands the whole time, even as Bill gestured to certain buildings, pointing with their clasped fingers. The fog from their breaths created a haze around them and a sort of... stillness to the night. Even though it was freezing, and Mike's nose was numb, he was comfortable. Bill made him comfortable.

They reached Bill's house too soon, and Bill drove to Mike's too fast. As Bill parked on the street, Mike said, "This is me. I had a really good time.." Bill smiled at him. Mike smiled back, enraptured.

Bill grabbed Mike's hand after a short pause, and Mike's breath hitched. "Have a good evening, Mike."

No stutter. Mike didn't know what that meant, if anything, but he hoped Bill felt as comfortable with him as he did with Bill. The look on Bill's face made Mike think he did.

Unfortunately, the night had to end, and leaving Bill's car for the cold night air was almost painful. Walking inside his house, no matter how warm it was, hurt too. Mike's heart tugged him back to Bill, but his car had already driven away. *It's fine*, Mike thought. *We'll see each other again soon.*

What wasn't fine at all, however, was the smug look Nancy aimed at him from the couch as he passed through the living room. "Shut up," he said, before she could comment.

"I didn't say anything!" she laughed. "I'm just looking."

"Yeah, well, you're thinking something." Mike paused to cross his arms and lean against the wall. "Come on, out with it. It's whatever."

Nancy smiled, a real, soft smile. "I'm just thinking that I'm proud of you," she said. "You found this guy, and you talk to him, and you look so smitten right now. I'm glad he makes you happy."

And that was sweeter than Mike expected, so all he could do was awkwardly smile back. "Thanks, Nance." Then he remembered that he was still wearing Jonathan's jacket, so he took it off and handed it to her. "Here, give this back to *your* guy."

Nancy laughed at him, but took the jacket. "Alright, Michael. Go unpack your room. We got almost everything put away down here, no thanks to you. Mom will have a fit if you're not done soon."

So Mike dashed up to the stairs to unpack as many boxes as he could before he tired out. He fell on his bed four hours later, back aching, nearly every box empty, but clothes and knick-knacks strewn about the room in an unorganized mess. Karen walked in as he groaned, and she laughed at him as she sat next to him on his bed. "At least you've made progress," she said. "Thank you for unpacking some, Michael."

"Of course, mom," he told her. "I thought I'd be home earlier so it's not all done."

"Oh!" she gasped. "How was your date, darling?"

Mike blushed. "I don't think it was a real date, mom. We were just meeting."

"But you're blushing!" she cooed. "So he was real then?"

Mike giggled. "Yes, he's a real boy. He's really nice, I think you'd like him."

"Well, I'll have to meet him soon then, won't I?" She stroked his hair gently. "I'm happy for you, Michael. Get some sleep." She kissed his forehead then stood up. "I hope you two work out," she said as she left.

"Yeah," Mike whispered back, long after his mom had left his room. "I hope so too."

He went to sleep with thoughts of a happy future dancing around in his brain. Maybe Novembers wouldn't be so bad, if Bill was there to make him smile.

Notes for the Chapter:

I love how i wanted to update every week but here we are,, 2 weeks between updates ! zoijs!

alright i owe my whole entire full ass life to my bets, PAIGE, the 1 the only.. followe her tumbler mygoldfishateit.tumblr.com she deservez it.. she also wrote some parts of this and savd christmas (this chapter)

Author's Note:

comments make me write much faster :)

i love wheelbrough. title from 'in my dreams' by ruth b.

tumblr-> toes-ier.tumblr.com :)